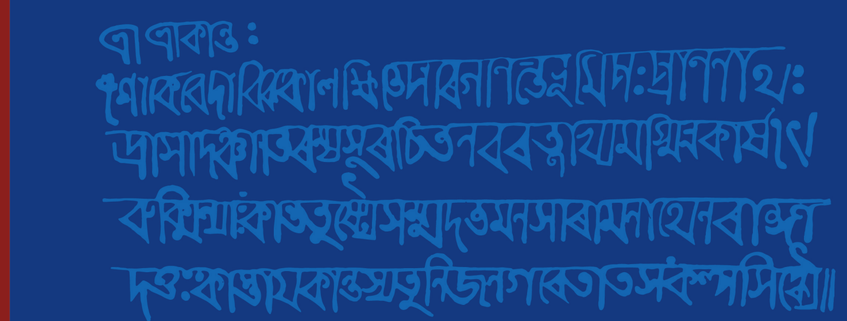
The Department of Archaeology is one of the oldest departments in the Indian sub-continent. The journey of this department started in 1861 CE under the name of the Archaeological Survey of India. After independence in 1971 CE, the head office of the Department of Archaeology of Bangladesh was established in Dhaka. In 1983, the head office, including four regional offices was established in Dhaka through departmental reorganisation. At present departmental activities are conducted through the Dhaka Regional Office including Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions, the Rajshahi Regional Office including Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions, and the Khulna Regional Office including Khulna and Barishal divisions, and the Chattogram Regional Office including Chattogram and Sylhet divisions.

At present, there are 517 protected and enlisted antiquities and archaeological sites under the Department of Archaeology. Among them, Mahasthangarh, Mainamati, Shalban Vihara, Paharpur Buddhist Vihara, Sitakot Vihara, Kantjir Temple, Chota Sona Mosque, Satgumbuj Mosque, Vasuvihara, Barobazar, Lalbagh Fort, and others are very important antiquities and archaeological sites.

In addition, 28 museums and archaeological sites of the Department of Archaeology located in different parts of Bangladesh are open for visiting with entrance fees. By visiting these museums and archaeological sites, local and foreign visitors, students and researchers gain an exhaustive knowledge of the history and heritage of the country.



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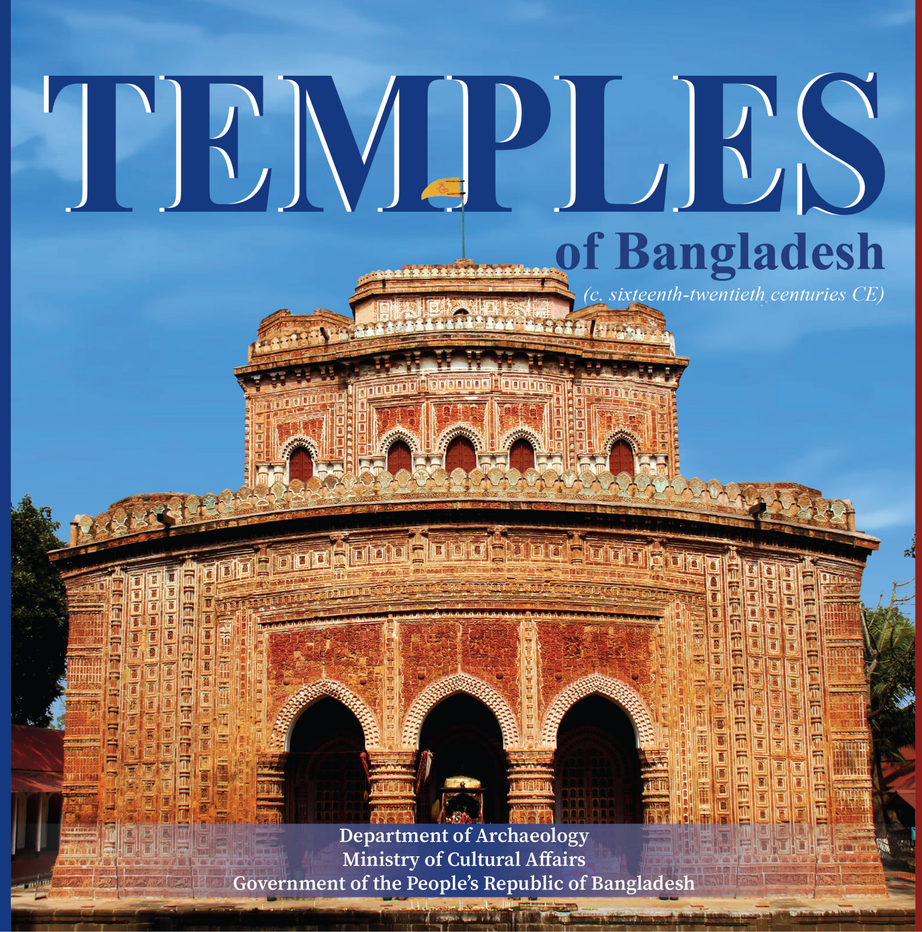
TEMPLES OF BANGLADESH
(c. sixteenth-twentieth centuries CE)

TEMPLES
of Bangladesh
(c. sixteenth-twentieth centuries CE)



Department of Archaeology
Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Temples of Bangladesh

(c. sixteenth-twentieth centuries CE)

with reference to some selective examples

Md Shahin Alam
Md Khairul Bashar Swapan
Md Amiruzzaman

Revised and Edited by

Swadhin Sen

Department of Archaeology
Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Temples of Bangladesh *(c. sixteenth-twentieth centuries CE)*

Md Shahin Alam, Md Khairul Bashar Swapan and Md Amiruzzaman
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Cover Photos
Front: Front view of Kantajee Temple, Dinajpur District © DoA
Back: Dedicatory inscription at Kantajee Temple (digtized) © DoA
(Tentative translation of the text from the Bengali text in Zakariah 2011: 127)
King Prannath commenced the construction of the palacelike, beautiful and well-built nava-ratna adobe of god. In order to satisfy Rukhsminikanta [Sri Krishna] [and] for completing the solemn vow of the father, King Ramnath dedicated this temple to Kanta [Sri Krishna] in his own town [Kantanagar] in 1674 Saka Era [1752 CE].
Left flap: Department of Archaeology head office at Agargaon, Dhaka © DoA
Right flap: Terracotta art at Puthia Chota Anhik Temple, Rajshahi District © DoA

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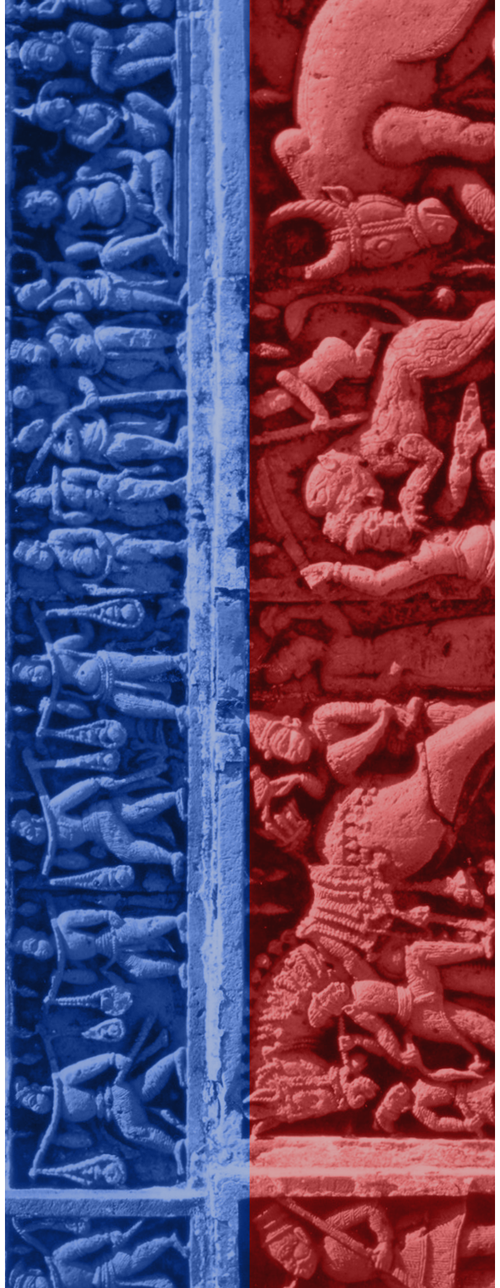

FOREWORD

Department of Archaeology has taken the initiative to publish a series of books by modifying the thematic proposals for updating the UNESCO world heritage Tentative List. The proposals have already been submitted. Considering the format of a book, the proposals which were prepared following specific guidelines and framework, the contents and structures have been changed and reorganized. As a part of this initiative, this book entitled **Temples of Bangladesh (c. sixteenth-twentieth centuries CE)** with refence to selective examples is published. As the Director General of the Department of Archaeology, I am honoured to write this short forward to the book. I am also humbled to present some of the wonderful examples of the temples representing distinct regional style which influenced various architectural works in South Asia. This publication highlights the consistent and continuous hard work of the Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh for the protection, preservation and present the rich and varied cultural heritage of Bangladesh. This book is meant for a wider audience on one hand. Some of the new and recent perspectives on the conceptualization and interpretation of the monumental remains and temples have also been addressed. In this way, this short publication could be a frame of reference for the enthusiasts and scholars alike for changing their ways of seeing the temples of the aforementioned period. I wish this book will satisfy the curiosity and interest of the broader audience. I would like to thank the editorial board for their comments on this book. I want to express my gratitude to the persons and officials from different regional offices for assisting in the preparation of the proposals. I am thankful to the UNESCO Office, Dhaka for their support and to Dr. Sharif Shams Imon who worked in the project as an International Consultant. Tanzia Mobarak Monisha has taken meticulous care of the task of copy-editing, and I am indebted to her. The authors of the book deserve special credit for their systematic, persistent, and enthusiastic work. I am grateful to Professor Swadhin Sen for taking care of the meticulous and knowledgeable revision and editing work.

Happy reading.

Your sincerely,

Ratan Chandra Pandit
Director General (Additional Secretary)
Department of Archaeology
Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh

KANTAJEE TEMPLE

Kantajee Temple, Dinajpur District (1871)- © John Henry Ravenshaw (British Museum)

PREFACE

I, as a national consultant, was working on the project to upgrade the tentative list of World Heritage Sites of Bangladesh with our colleagues from the Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, supported by the UNESCO Office, Bangladesh. Together, we developed thematic proposals and submitted the report. We did not think that these few proposals could be published as a book in the future. It is the present Director General of the Department of Archaeology, Mr. Ratan Chandra Pandit (Additional Secretary), who has taken the initiative to publish one of the proposals in the form of this book. We had to reformulate and reorganize the texts of the proposals with necessary illustrations and images as a book. This book aims at reaching a broader audience with hints at various possibilities of understanding and interpreting the Late Medieval and Colonial temples of Bangladesh (and undivided Bengal). Despite the previous pathbreaking studies of several scholars, such as David McCutchion, Hitesranjan Sanyal, Dipak Ranjan Das, Tarapada Santra, and AKM Zakariah, the study of temples is still dominated by formalistic and stylistic understanding with an inclination to simplified art historical approaches. Even when architectural (and art) historical disciplines are transforming into interdisciplinary frameworks involving the concepts and methods of social sciences and earth sciences, very few studies are available on these temples from an interdisciplinary framework. In addition to representing some of the protected and preserved specimens, this book humbly hints at the possibilities of transdisciplinary engagement with these monumental remains. The credit for this publication primarily goes to the present Director General and the authors as the members of the Heritage Cell of the Department of Archaeology. Our colleagues from various regional offices have provided great support during the project. We are indebted to them. We would like to thank Dr. Sharif Shams Imon, who worked tirelessly on the earlier project as an international consultant. My fieldwork and conversation with Dr. Mrinmoyee Ray have contributed a lot in developing my understanding of the Bengal temples, and I acknowledge my debt of gratitude to her and to Subir Sarkar. Suggestions from the editorial board were important for the final shaping of this book.

As a team, we have tried to point at the ways in which the Late Medieval and Colonial temples of Bangladesh can be addressed, understood, experienced, and contextualized as archaeological and historical records in different ways. Their conceptualization as ‘places’ which are active in the processes of making various meanings and values as heritage sites in relation to human actors in various spatio-temporality has also been taken into a cursory account. We hope that the readers would be benefited and informed by this effort from the Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. I am humbled to revise and edit the book, and I thank the Department of Archaeology for giving me the opportunity to write this short preface. We apologize for all mistakes.

Swadhin Sen
15 October, 2022

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

There are many strict and loose conventions on the transliteration and transcription from one script to another dissimilar script. For example, there are different conventions of Romanization and the use of diacritic marks according to orthography and phonetics. The conventions vary according to institutions, publishers, projects, and the intended audience. In this book, we have omitted diacritics in favor of phonetic transliteration attuned to idiomatic English. Except for proper nouns, place names, or words familiar to English readers, all words from other scripts have been Romanized. Several words in this book have origins in Sanskrit or other languages, and they have become essentially Bengali. In those cases, the transliteration follows the norms for Bengali script.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCE	Before the Common Era
c.	Circa (approximately)
CE	Common Era
Cen.	Century
DoA	Department of Archaeology
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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TEMPLES OF BANGLADESH

Context of the Puthia Palace and Temple Complex, Rajshahi
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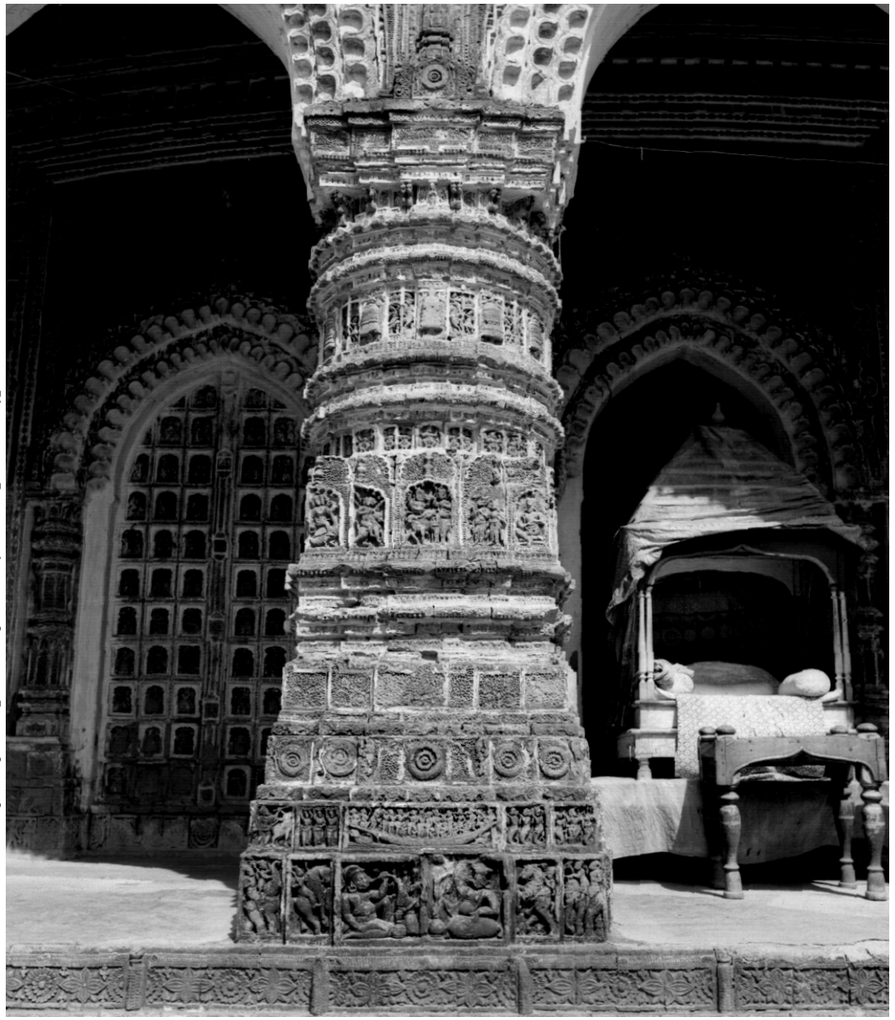
Contextualization

of the Late Medieval and Colonial temples in Bangladesh

Temples are not only monuments or monumental remains in the context of the history of society, cultures, religions, and regions in Bangladesh (and in South Asia). Brahmanical (or Hindu),Buddhist, Jain, and various religious traditions with their heterogeneity and ritualistic performances are also shaped and refashioned by the temples for the last two millennia. In this sense, temples were active agents in the making of power relations, identities, and social formations. Temple-building activities and architectural styles of a specific temple began to take a discernable pattern from the c. third–fourth centuries CE during the rule of the Gupta Dynasty with a centralized empire. Different sections of the social groups were involved in the patronage of these temple-building activities. Within the genre of various normative and prescriptive texts, *shilpashasras* and *vastushastras* started to be formulated and textualized with specific standards, norms, and rituals to design, establish and use of the temples. Most of these canonical normative texts were formulated and textualized by the Brahmins, and often, deviations from the norms were considered as blasphemous and punishable. In the northern and southern parts of the Indian subcontinent (comprising the present-day countries of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan), two distinct styles had developed. The northern one was known as the Nagara style and the southern one was recognized as the *Dravida*.



Terracotta art at one of the front pillars of Kantajee Temple, Dinajpur District, 1987 © DoA

Subsequently, many regional and historical period-specific sub-styles came into being. (Das 2020; Hardy 2007, 2020a, 2020b; Kramrich 1946). Gradually, temples became a centre of authority, power, and the representation of king as the mundane incarnation of divine. They also turned into nodal points in trade and communication networks and a point around which the settlement formed (see, Champakalaksmi 1996; Heitzman 1987; Lahiri 2021; Lee 2012; Gupta 2020; Sen 2015, 2019).

The present-day Indian state of Odisha witnessed the development of the *Kalinga* style of temple architecture in c. sixth–seventh centuries CE. Bangladesh and the state of West Bengal, India (making a distinct cultural region around c. seventh–eighth centuries CE) were dotted with temples – Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jain – after the initiation in this period. The temples were both brick and stone-built, with an influence of *Nagara* style. The temples were lofty and smaller. Gradually, they became structurally complex with the addition of various horizontal and vertical spatial and decorative components. The temples were lofty with a curvilinear *shikhara* (tower-like superstructure) or with a low *shikhara* (Das 1982; Khare 2005).

Many temples were built during this period under the patronage of the ruling dynasties or the intermediary

The aerial view of Kantajee Temple, Dinajpur District, 2020 © Pinu Rahman (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3.jpg), https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode

landlords in Bangladesh. The remains of these temples are being exposed by archaeological excavations and detected by archaeological surveying. In these brick-built temples, the high, imposing, and decorated superstructures *(shikhara)* are missing. They had collapsed and later the edifices were reused in many cases (see, Sen 2015, 2018; Sen et al. 2018) missing because of the vagaries of time. Most of these temples of Bangladesh, characterized by a riverine alluvial floodplain, were marked with terracotta plaques. This distinct form of clay art manifested various carved, moulded, and incised figures (both religious divinities and secular beings). Manufactured by clay processing and figure making, these artistic traditions gave rise to a regional style of artistic medium, form, and contents. Usually, they were attached to the façade or the visible external surfaces of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples or shrines or monasteries (Sen 2015, 2018; Sen et al. 2018).

Art historians and experts on the evolution of temple architecture have suggested that these temples were not simply a religious built space. According to canonical texts and other sources, these monuments were perceived as the earthly abode of divinities. Various idols, made of stone, stucco, metal, wood, and clay, were worshipped in these temples which structurally consisted mainly of two parts. The chamber in which the idols of deities was kept and worshipped is known as *garbhagriha* (an abode like the womb), and the chamber where the worshippers gathered and performed their rituals to the specific deity to which the temple was dedicated is known as *mandapa* (assembly hall). Idols of deities, floral, geometric, and other decorative motifs were used with the main construction materials on the external, and quite often, on the internal surface, and the corbelled roofs or vaults of these two parts. These temples, according to scholars, also represent the social stratifications, patronage patterns, and political authority and power of the patrons. On predominantly flat terrain, the superstructures

were visible from a distance, and the mere viewing of the temple was considered to be an act of gaining merit (Hardy 2020b; Sen 2018; Sen et al. 2018; Sanyal 2018, 1981, 1989). The temples and their building activities saw a detectable decline during c. fourteenth–fifteenth centuries. Some new evidence from the archaeological excavations in Bangladesh suggests that the decline was neither universal nor homogenous. Several temples from the earlier periods continued to be restored and reused in Bangladesh. Many temples were constructed and patronized by various social and economic groups in the southern and eastern parts of the Indian sub-continent (see, for example, Meister 1987).

The region of undivided Bengal (present Bangladesh and West Bengal, India) with adjacent regions of present Tripura, Assam, and Orissa witnessed proliferation of temple-building activities after the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries CE. The formal and stylistic characteristics of these temple ensembles represent new forms as well as a continuation from the early types (McCutchion 1972; Das 2020; Dasgupta 1971; Zakariah 2010). The fusion of Indo-Islamic architectural forms and techniques with the local ones gave birth to new vernacular forms, types, and decorative patterns. The temples later became another monumental assemblage to infuse elements and ideas from the Europeans. The European influence became more prominent during the colonial period. A distinct narratology of epics, popular events of the lives of *Radha-Krishna*, and many secular themes depicted by terracotta plaques became inseparable from temple architecture. Researchers have developed new typology and heuristic device to elaborate upon these new architectural forms. The dominant trends of these new studies, however, have been monument-centric and formalistic in their foundational frame of references. Following a few earlier studies focusing more on the interconnection of religious, political, social, and economic contexts and their complex transformations, scholars are gradually shifting their attention to a transdisciplinary framework for the understanding of these religious monuments in intimate connection with the landscapes, society, religious traditions, and politics. The inseparability of colonial transformation from the transformation of religious traditions and temple-building activities in the changing terrain of complex caste and class mobility are gaining more traction in recent.

Objectives of the Publication

This publication has a very humble purpose. It presents some of the well preserved and conserved brick-built and terracotta-adorned temples, and most of them are under the protection of the Department of Archaeology. This publication emphasizes visual as well as summarized classification of these sacred monuments. The purpose of this publication is also to point out the ways the history and heritage meanings of the temples could be addressed and elaborated in the future. Finally, this publication is a brief and illustrated presentation of some of the notable brick-built temples under the protection of the Department of Archaeology with some of their attributes and interpretive possibilities. The fundamental objective of this book is to present the protected temples to a wider and general audience. This publication, therefore, must not be considered as an exhaustive account and interpretation based on meticulous details. The fact stated and illustrations presented, nevertheless, are carefully cited and authenticated in reference to scholastic works.

Hatikumrul Nava-ratna Temple, Sirajgonj District © https://youtu.be/1QT-fvqfjpI

The historical context

of the second surge of temple building

The depiction of royal hunting scenes where bearers are in Mughal dress at the West Right Block (Left to Right) of Kantajee Temple, Dinajpur District © DoA

During the sixteenth century CE, known as the Sultanate period in Bengal, a distinct set of temple-building activities with an ensemble of many new forms developed in Bangladesh (and West Bengal, India). Most of the scholars point at the rise and development of a new *bhakti* (devotional) movement as a distinct tradition under Hinduism in the Bengal region (present Bangladesh) and West Bengal, India (Chakrabarty 1985; see Jaiswal 2015). This movement's central figures were Sri Chaitanyadeva, and his companions, such as Sri Nityanandadeva, Sri Advaita Acharya, Srivas, and Narahari Sarkar. By contesting the oppressive social inequality of the caste system, and with the aid of religious syncretism and interchange between Islamic and Hindu architectural traditions complemented by the tolerance and assistance of the Muslim rulers, this movement swayed various parts of Bengal, and in other parts, especially Puri and Vrindavan. Popularly known as *Neo-Vaisnavism* or *Gaudiya* Vaisnavism. Vaisnavism, this movement developed around love and devotion for the Hindu deities *Krishna* (considered to be an incarnation of the Hindu God *Vishnu*) and *Radha*. The duality and unity of the masculine and the feminine were celebrated through love and devotion and embodied rituals, and some of the rituals were identified as obscene and promiscuous. These rituals were not sanctioned by the established Brahmin (higher caste) controlled religious practices (see, Bhatia 2017; Connell 1971; Wong 2018). The impact of this movement was immense on the society, culture, and religious geography of the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent, and it extended to Orissa and also to north India (Chakrabarty 1985). This religious movement had a public manifestation of devotionals in the ways of gathering, dancing, singing, and chanting. These embodied rituals were organized on the streets, in front of the temple, and inside households (e.g., courtyards, houses, etc.) and often, in open spaces. Broadly categorized as *kirtan*, these collective performative acts attracted mass people and democratized the rituals (Sanyal 1989). After the demise of two of the central figures among whom Sri Chaitanyadeva was perceived as an incarnation of the Hindu deity *Krishna*, the movement was divided into different lineages.

The main protagonists and organizers moved to north India and built Vrindaban as a new centre of authority. Goswamis in Vrindavan under the authority of *sada-goswami* (six *goswamis*) began to textualize, Sanskritize, and Brahmanize the tradition. In Bengal, the movement continued with differences and reconfigurations. Various recent studies have focused on the refashioning of *Vaisnava* traditions in post-Chaitanya period (Stewart 2010, 2020; Bhatia 2017; Dey 2015; Fuller 2005; Connell 1971; Wong 2018). Narattam Das, accompanied by Shyamananda and Srinivasacharya, was sent by Jiva Goswami (one of the central figures of the *sada-goswamis*) to sanitize the tradition from

impurities, and to construct a worldview to unify various lineages. The festival in Kheturi of present Rajshahi, Bangladesh, became the first major gathering of various lineages and sects. Hagiographies of Sri Chaitanya Deva in vernacular languages were written and decimated during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries CE (see, Stewart 2020; Wong 2018).

This was a time of transition, when Mughal rulers from north India conquered parts of Bengal. In different studies, the scholars like Tarapada Santra, Hiteshranjan Sanyal, Varuni Bhatia, Lucien Wong and others have contended that the temple building activities extended well into the other social, religious and economic groups (Sanyal n.d, 1981, 1989, 2018; Santra 2001; Michell1983; Wong 2018; Ray 2022, 2016b, 2015b, 2012; Patnaik 2014).

The reconfiguration of religious tradition and Brahmanization of the rituals paved the way for the advent of specific textual and prescriptive literature during colonial period with specific moral and ethical underpinnings. The *bhadralok* or the new middle class which emerged out of the colonial social and economic transformation promoted the new variety of Vaisnavism. Gradually, various religious sects and caste-occupation-professional groups with the aim of social mobility began to construct temples to assert their authority and identity in the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries CE. This is also the period when commercial contact and activities with the European powers intensified, and the European countries began to compete with each other to take control of the land and maritime trade routes and products.

Earlier researchers focused mainly on the *Gaudiya* Vaisnavism as the most important factor behind the surge of temple-building activities in Late Medieval and Colonial Bengal (McCutchion 1972). Some recent studies have shown that reconfigured *Sakta-Shaiva* traditions and popular religious traditions were equally crucial for understanding these temple building activities. Local deities popularized by *mangal-kavyas*, performative acts and vernacular literature became prominent as the central deity of many of these temples. Analyzing the archival data, Mrinmoyee Ray has recently pointed at the large proportion of the temples dedicated to *Shiva* (Ray 2022). The proportional difference between the *Vaisnava* and *Shaiva* temple are very low. Considering increasing rate and intensity of social, economic, and religious changes during and after the eighteenth century CE, multiple traditions transformed and took their latter shape by representing their authority, and the patrons' acceptability through temple building activities.

The rural commercialization intensified internal and external trade with the advent of European traders and emissaries. It increased financial capacities and social mobility of different lower caste and occupational groups. As a consequence, the emergence of a middle class in the eighteenth century onward created a complex and changing social and economic milieu. This is not surprising that the number of temples rose explicitly during the eighteenth and nineteenth century CE (see, Chadha 2005; Chaudhury 1975, 2017; Datta 2000; Dutta 2019; Mukherjee 2013; Nicholas 2003; Subramanyam 1990). The period also witnessed intensifying contestations among various religious traditions. A new urban middle class with close business and production relation to the rural areas sought their legitimacy and social authority by constructing temples, often associated with tanks. Instead of normative, simplified, and descriptive studies of forms and decorations of the temples, social scientists, including art and architectural historians, economic historians and environmental historians, are now focusing more on the broader and deeper conditions and processes of the temple-building activities in Bengal. Quite logically, they are shifting their attention to the context which created a

religious and social environment where the construction of temples was perceived and represented as power, authority, mobility, networking, and legitimization. Under these religious, political, and economic circumstances, the temples in Bangladesh saw the second stage of proliferation after the first stage (eighth–thirteenth century CE).

Considering the space and purpose, this publication does not allow to delve into the details of this paradigmatic shifts in the study of temples. This book has to confine itself to the protected temples for various legal and official reasons. The expected audience of the publication is also very wide and heterogenous. The cited publications in this section in particular, and in this book in general, however, may attract and inspire the enthusiastic and serious researchers to introduce themselves to relevant literature

Shamsundar Temple, Satkhira District © DoA

Annapurna Temple , Satkhira District © DoA

dealing with temples from transdisciplinary perspectives. We think that it is very essential and important to go beyond the conventional formalistic approach and to examine the temples in the complex historical context of Late Medieval and Colonial period.

Close association of the temple and the tanks/waterbody: Hatikamrul Nava-ratna Temple, Siranganj District © Kazi Rashed Abdallah (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shirajganj_NabaratnaMondir_16Oct16_60D_MG_4404.CR2_Pabna&Shirajganj_3839.jpg), https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode

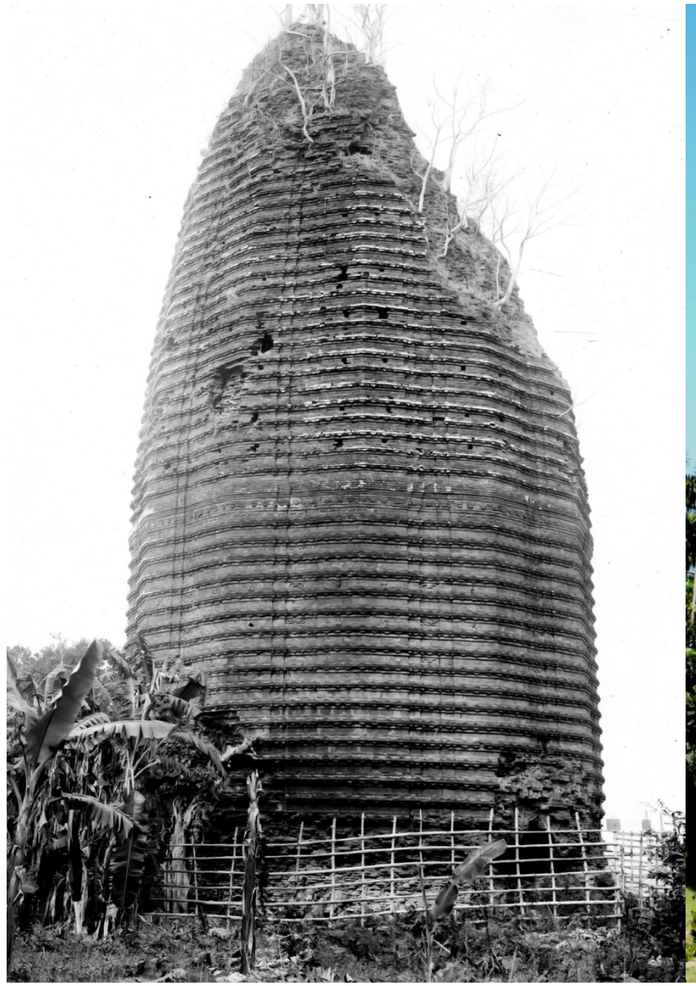
Gopinath Jor-Bangla Temple, Pabna District © DoA

Classification

of the temples: An extraordinary architectural ensemble reflecting synthesis and change

The temples, mostly constructed with bricks, were different in many ways from the early *Nagara* or *Kalinga* styles. Entirely new morphological styles and articulations of the built space were attained in the temple architecture of

Bangladesh (and West Bengal, India). These temples have been studied in detail by David J. McCutchion, and he published an elaborate classification of them in his pioneering book: *Late Medieval Temples in Bengal: Origins and Classification* (1972). Later pioneering scholars and researchers followed the scheme of his classification with minor modifications. The influence of Islamic architecture on these temples is evident in their construction technique, treatment of superstructure, and elaborate application of the arcuate method of vaulting. The protected temples selected for this book represent some of the categories of the classification above. The essential attributes of these selective categories are briefly described below:



Mathurapur Deul (before conservation), 1977, Faridpur District © DoA

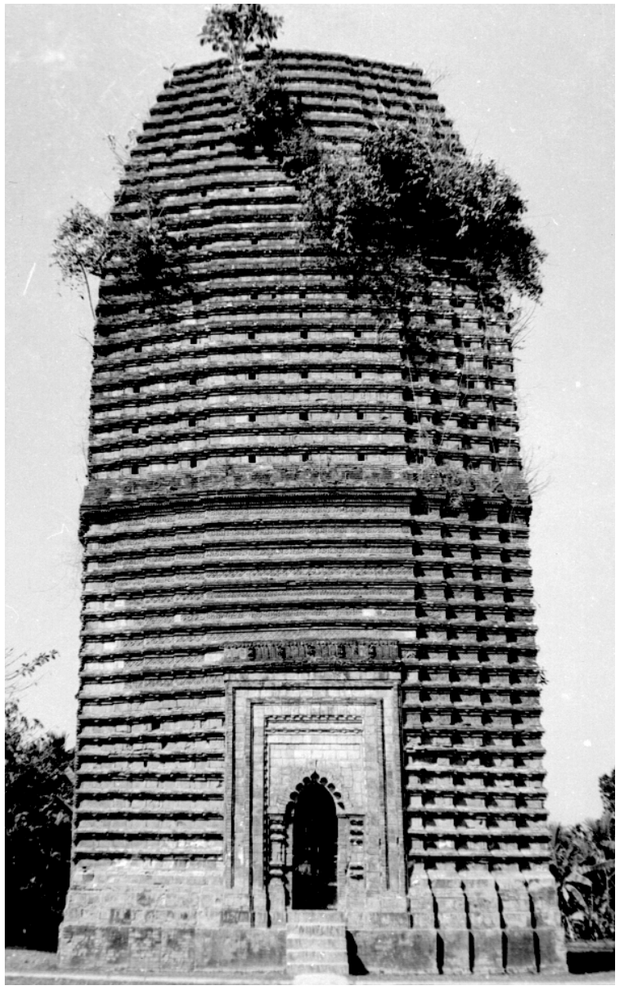
Mathurapur Deul (after conservation), Faridpur District © DoA

Rekha Temple A

Rekha is a Sanskrit word, meaning line. *Rekha* in Oriya means a straight line. *Rekha* temple is a tall building with a shape of a curvilinear or straight *sikhara* (or temple top). It looks like a spire, covering and protecting the sanctum *(garbhagriha)*. This type can be morphologically connected to the *Rekha deuls* of *Nagara* or *Kalinga* style of temples from the pre-thirteenth century CE northern and eastern parts of India. In many cases, the erection of this type of temple was associated with the commemoration of the dead and popularly identified as *math*. The following types of *rekha* temples are noticed in Bangladesh:

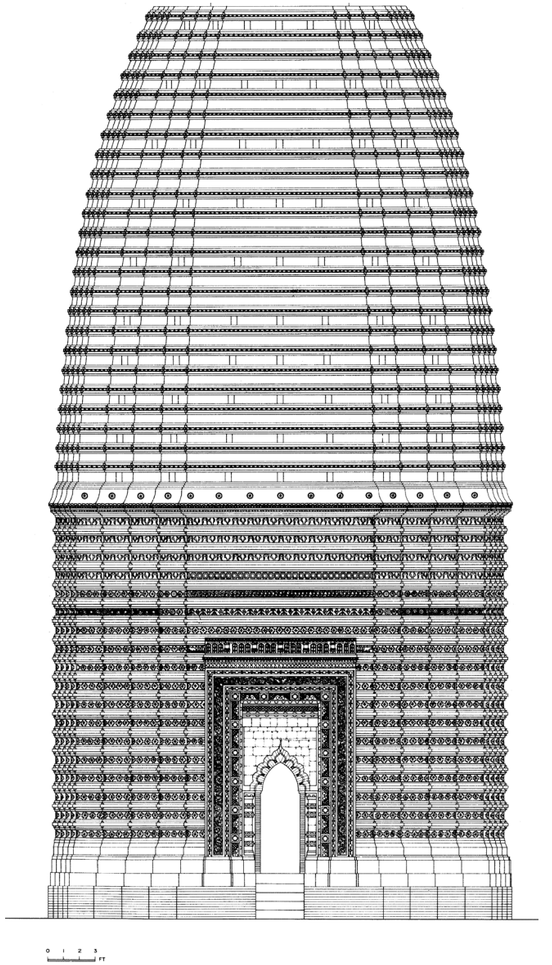
Ridged Curvilinear type

The *shikhara* or superstructure of this type display deep ridges on their external surface, and they are interrupted by niches at the centre of each side.

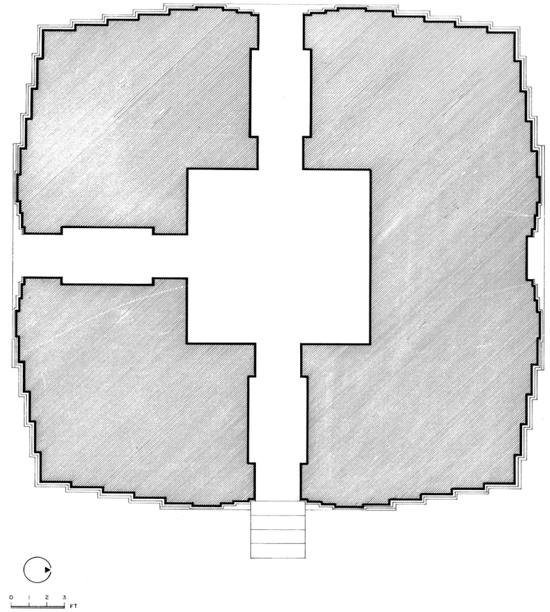


Kodla Math (before conservation), 1977, Bagerhat District © DoA

Kodla Math (after conservation), Bagerhat District © DoA



East elevation of Kodla Math
(Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)



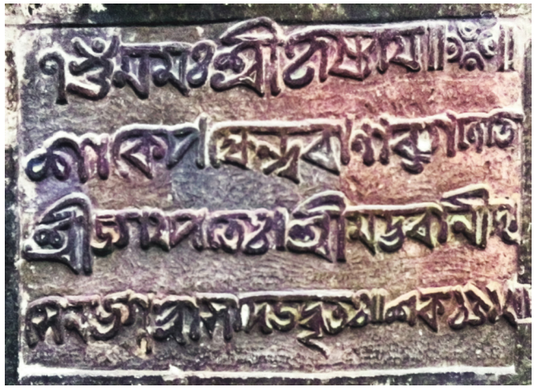
Ground Plan of Kodla Math
(Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

Straight-Edged Pyramidal type

The temples of this type contain a straight-edged pyramidal roof. The external side of the superstructure displays shallow ridges.

Octagonal double storied type

Octagonal types with different forms of superstructures are very common in Bengal. The temple presented in this book represents octagonal variety under which David McCutchion included this type. Based upon the currently absent superstructure, the temple has been classified under *rekha* type.



Dedicatory inscription at Handial Jagannath Temple
Source: Documentation on Terracotta Temples of Bangladesh, 2013 (see, Zakariah 2010: 243 for the reading of the inscription)

Handial Jagannath Temple, Pabna District © DoA

Bangla temple

B

It is one of the most innovative, familiar and common temple types of Late Medieval Bangladesh. They can be found in various combinations and forms. The basic layout of this category is derived from the traditional thatched huts of rural Bangladesh (and Bengal). This derivation was not uncommon in the Islamic architecture of this part of Bengal when domes of the mosques or tombs were built with the roofs like the huts. The simplest form of the domestic hut is built on an extended base. Two or four sides of the roof are sloping down towards the cardinal directions. The curvilinear edge and the gable end of the roof are also translated into the brick-built temple forms. They may have a single or triple-arched entrance with a profusely terracotta-decorated façade marked with two octagonal pillars and two octagonal pilasters. The top of the roof is curved and decorated with three to six finials. They are often found in association with the other types, as an entrance, as a superstructure, or as *garbhagriha*. The subcategories of this type included in this book are as follows:

Ek-Bangla/Do-Chala

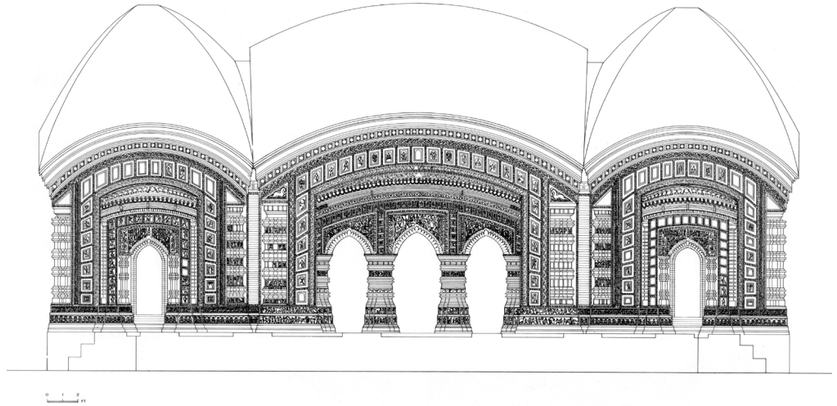
These temples represent the simplest form of the domestic hut with two sides to the sloping roof, the curvilinear edge, and the gable end of the roof. The *Ek-bangla/Do-chala* temple is also called the 'single hut-type temple'.

Twin Ek-Bangla/Jor-Bangla

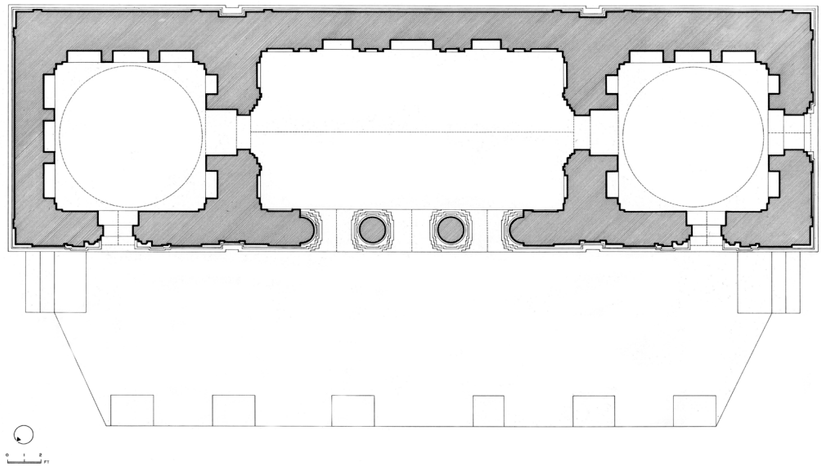
Two-hut or *Ek-bangla/Do-chala* in a conjoined form is called *Jor-bangla* temple. These temples represent a unique creation and fusion of vaulting with triple-arched entrances into the frontal chamber.

Puthia Bara Anhik Temple (before conservation), 1978, Rajshahi District © DoA

Puthia Bara Anhik Temple (after conservation), Rajshahi District © DoA



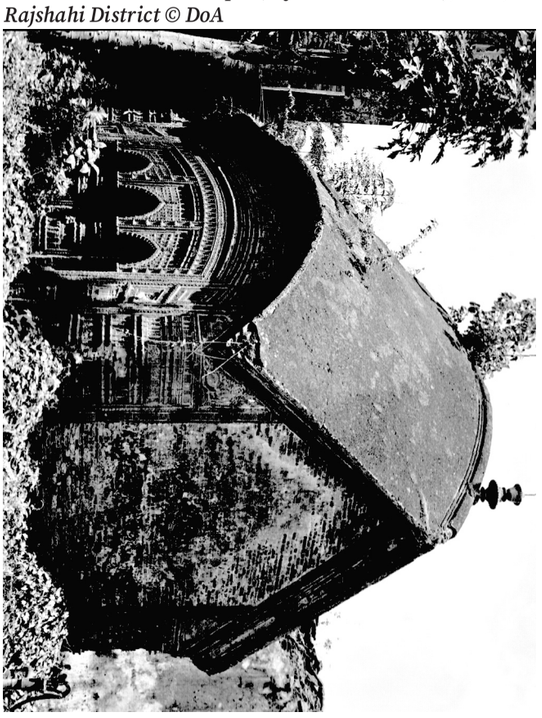
North-west elevation of Puthia Bara Anhik Temple
(Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)



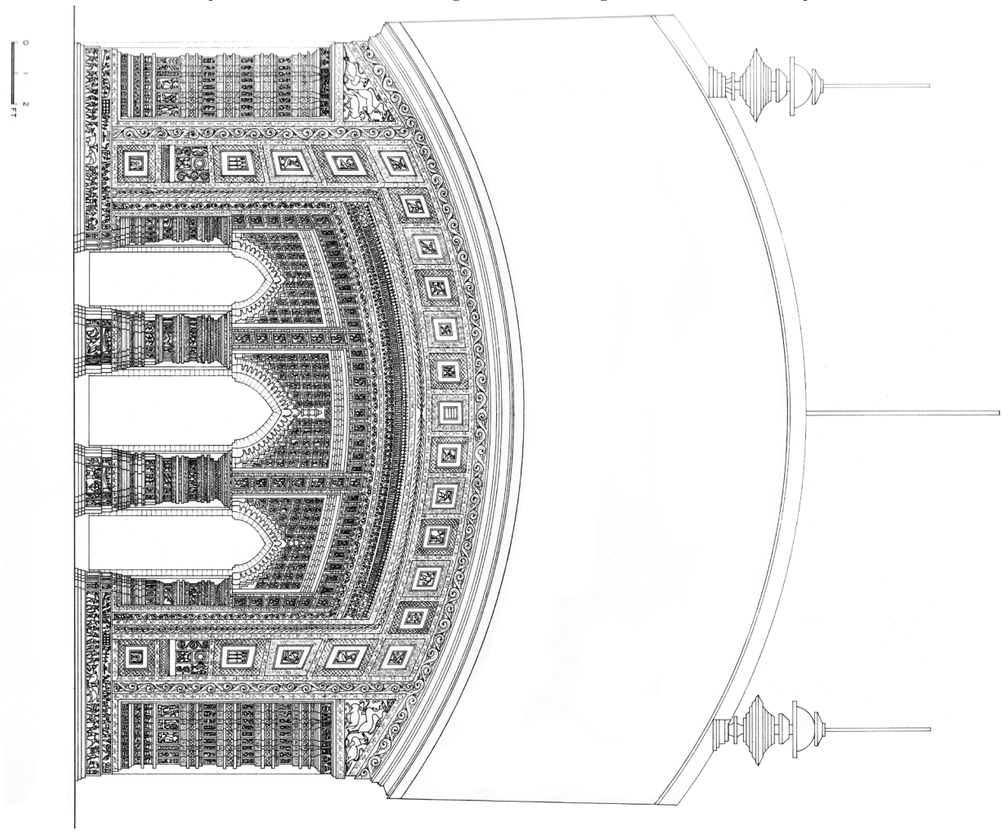
Ground plan of Puthia Bara Anhik Temple
(Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

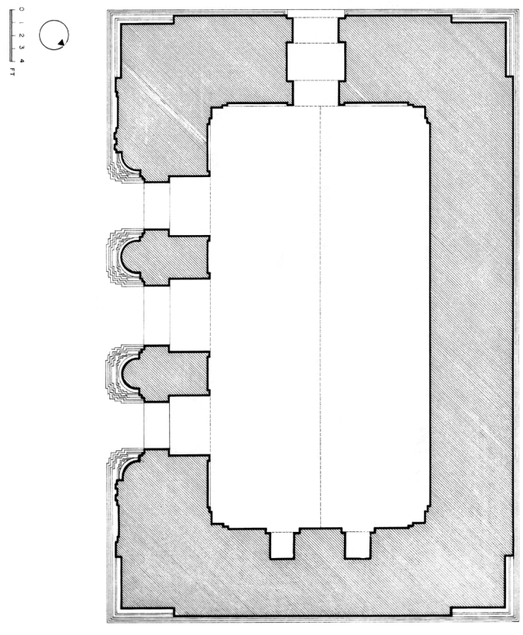
Puthia Chota Anhik Temple (after conservation), Rajshahi District © DoA

Puthia Chota Anhik Temple (before conservation), 1978, Rajshahi District © DoA



South-east elevation of Puthia Choto Anhik Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

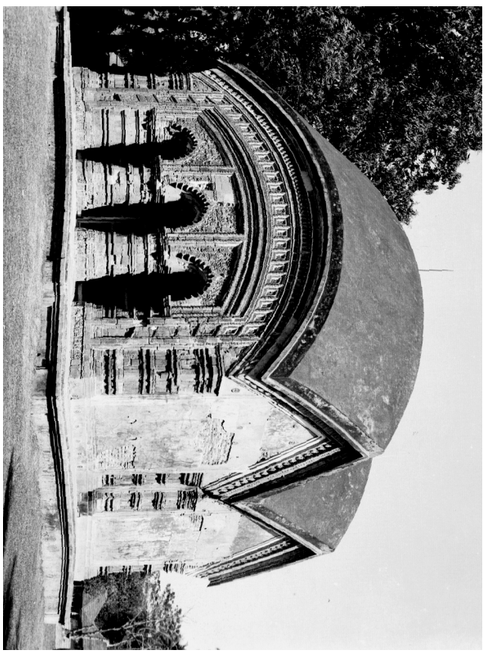




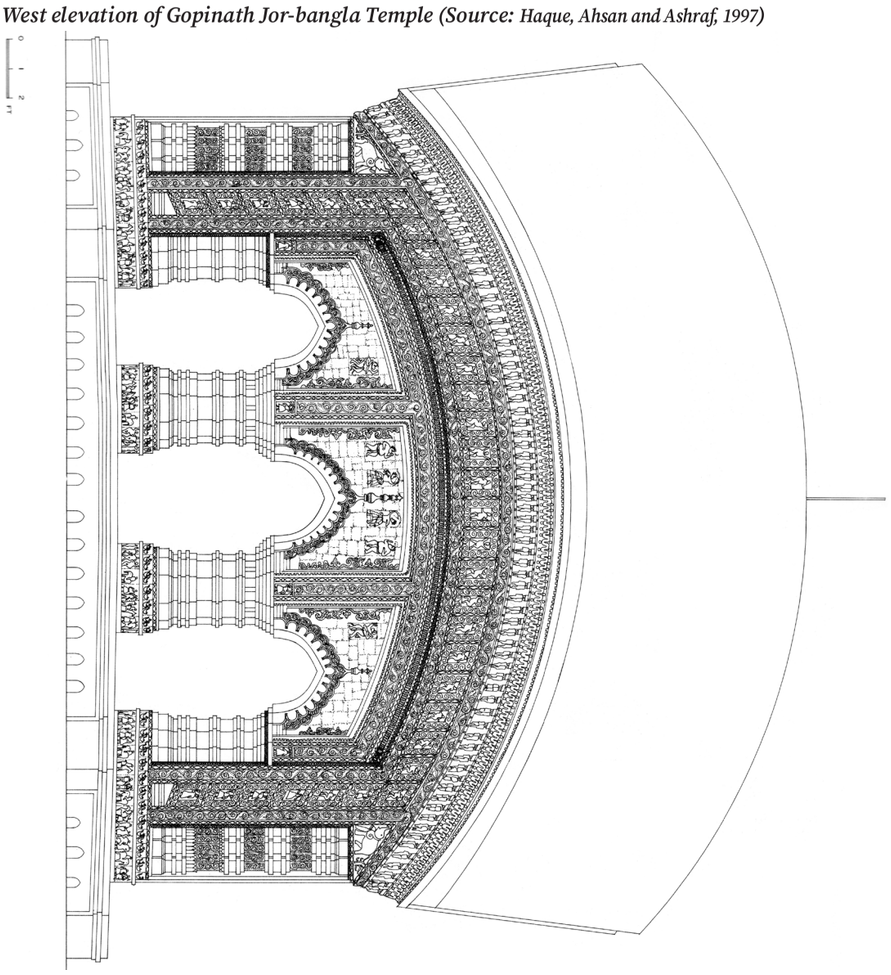
Ground plan of Puthia Choto Anhik Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

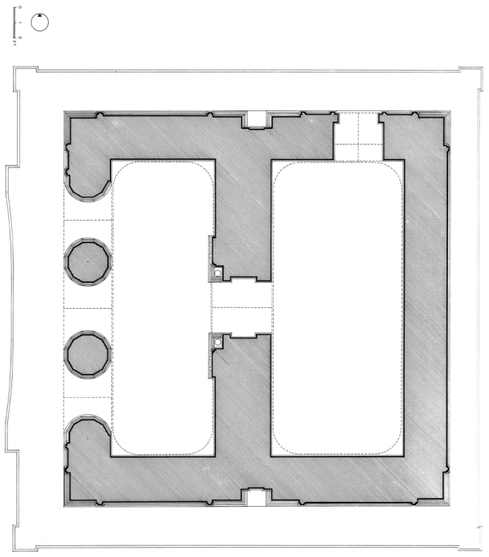
Gopinath Jor-bangla Temple (after conservation), Pabna District (present day) © DoA

Gopinath Jor-bangla Temple (before onservation), 1966, Pabna District © DoA



West elevation of Gopinath Jor-bangla Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

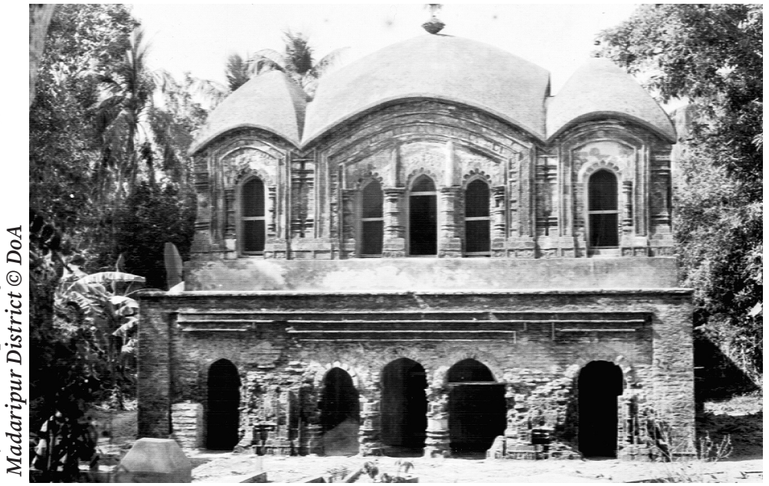




Ground plan of Gopinath Jor-bangla Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

Kotakol Jor-bangla Temple, Narail District © DoA

Chaklanabish Jor-bangla Temple, Narail District © DoA



Rajaram Temple (before conservation), Madaripur District © DoA

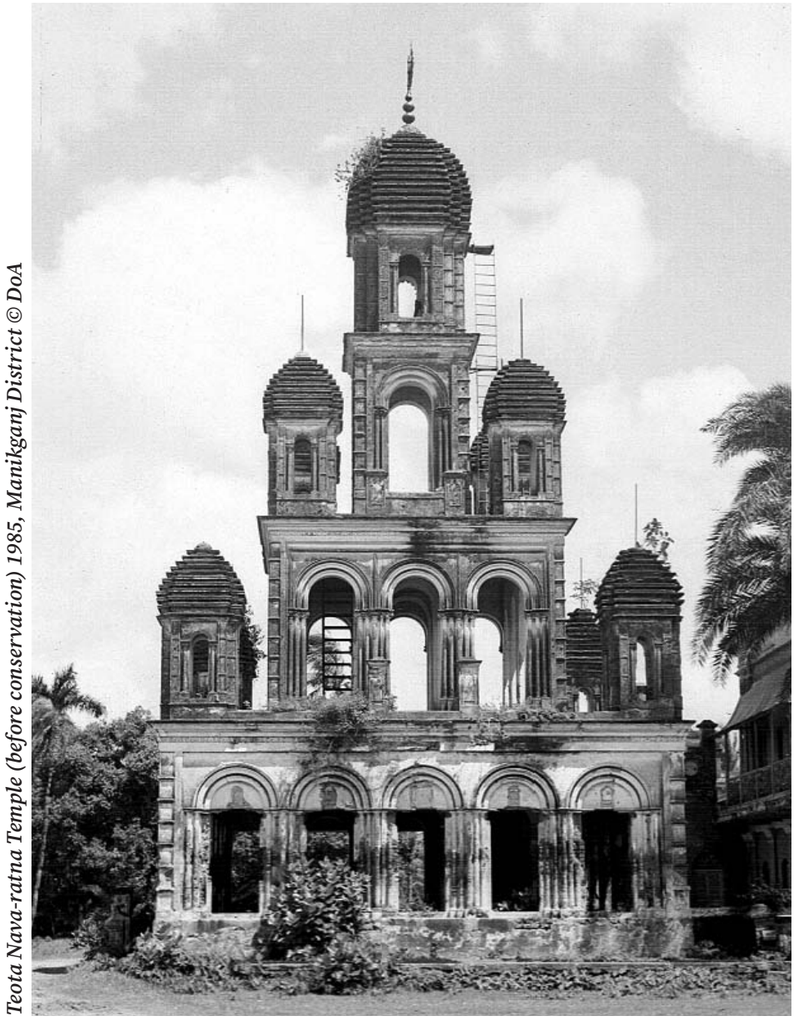
Rajaram Temple (after conservation), Madaripur District © DoA

Hatikumrul Bangla Ghara Temple, Sirajgonj District © DoA

Ratna temples

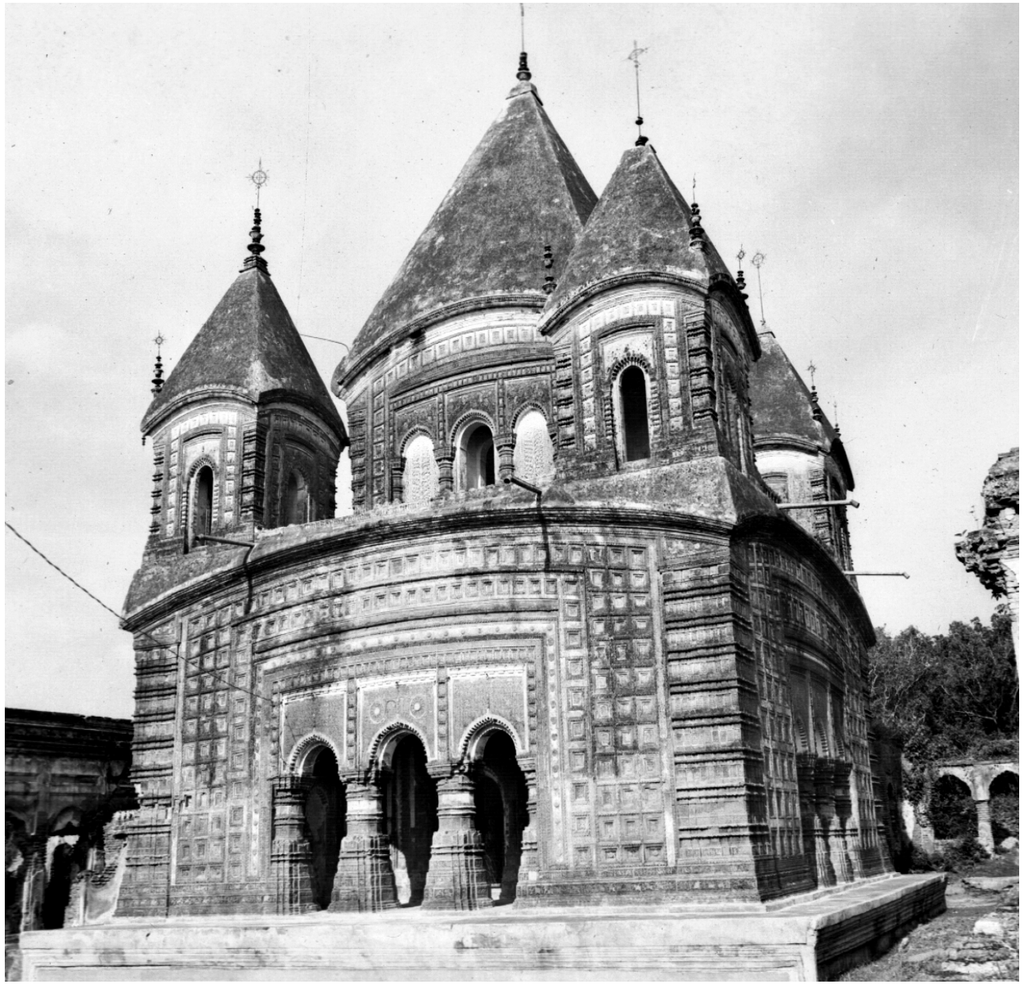
C

Ratna can be literally translated as 'jewel' in English, and this type of temple is recognized in reference to the number of towers, small or large, of a temple. This type has various subtypes. The main *shikhara* or tower of the temple is constructed on the top of the sanctum. Often, the temple vertically ascended in tiered steps with the towers on four corners built through the installation of pinnacles (tower/turret/peak) on the roof of the temple. It is important to note that a pinnacle (tower/turret/peak) on the roof of the temple is called a *ratna* (jewel/gem). The temple with only a pinnacle at the centre of its roof is called *Ek Ratna* (one jewel) temple. The *Pancha-ratna* (five jewels) temple is built with four pinnacles at the four corners and the central pinnacle on its roof. In this way, by increasing the number of pinnacles, *Nava-ratna* (nine jewels), *Trayodasha-ratna* (thirteen jewels), *Saptadasha-ratna* (seventeen jewels), *Ekbingshati-ratna* (twenty-one jewels) and *Panchabingshati-ratna* (twenty-five jewels) temples were named.



Teota Nava-ratna Temple (before conservation) 1985, Manikganj District © DoA

Teota Nava-ratna Temple (after conservation), Manikganj District © DoA



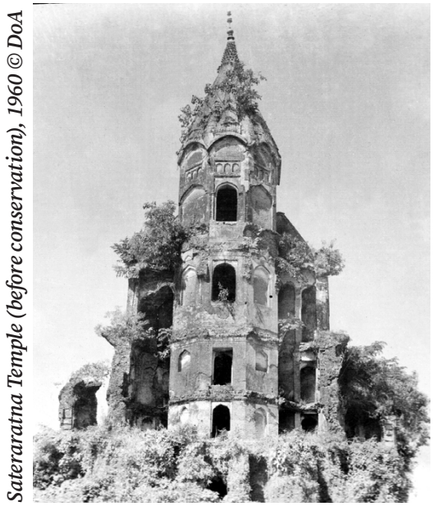
Puthia Pancharatna Govinda Temple (before conservation) 1987, Rajshahi District © DoA

Puthia Pancharatna Govinda Temple (after conservation), Rajshahi District © DoA

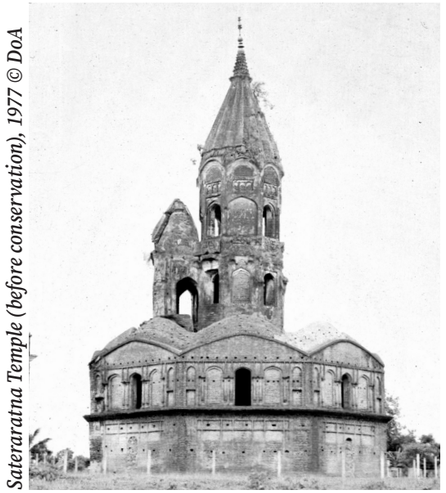
Presentation of the cultural biography of the Jagannath Temple, Cumilla based upon archival illustrations and photos

Pen and ink drawing by Frederic Peter Layard, 1843 © British Library

Sateraratna Temple (before conservation), 1960 © DoA



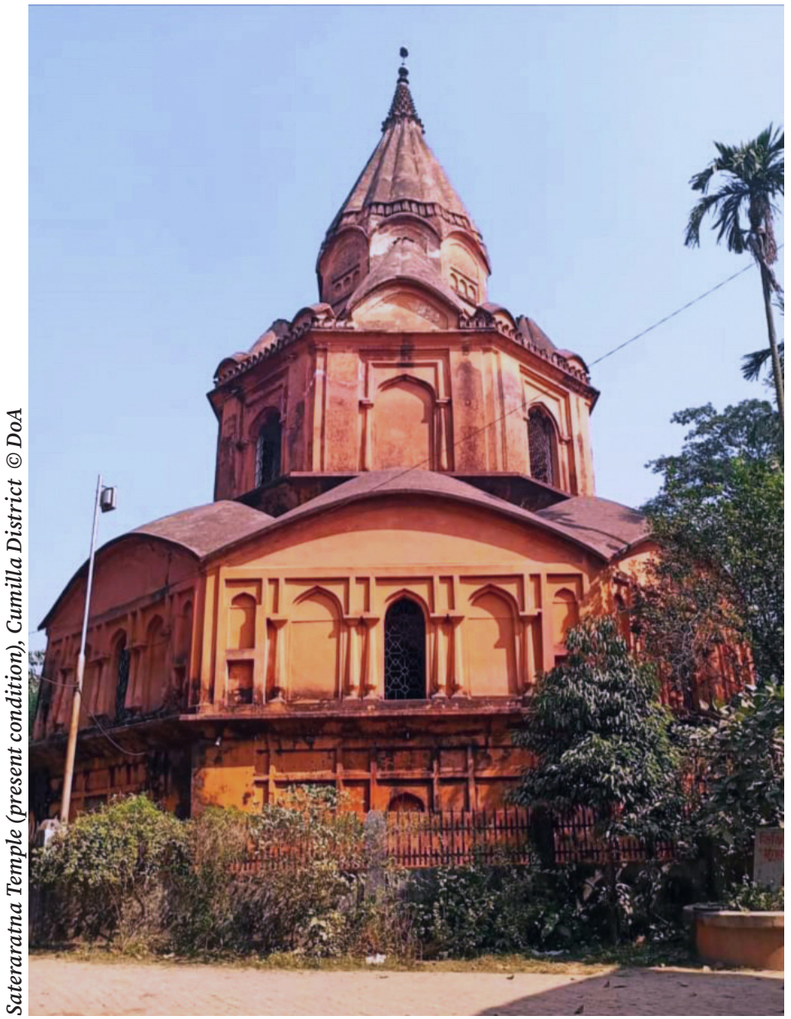
Sateraratna Temple (before conservation), 1960 © DoA



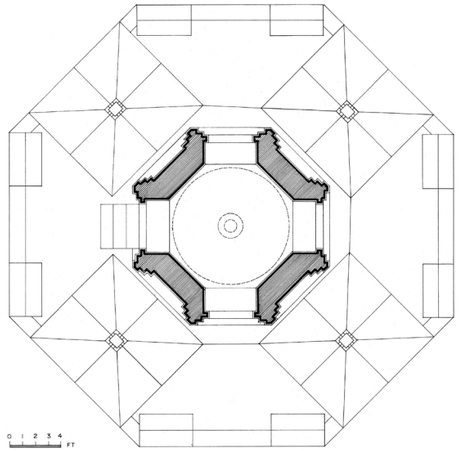
Sateraratna Temple (before conservation), 1977 © DoA

Sateraratna Temple (after conservation, 1982) © DoA

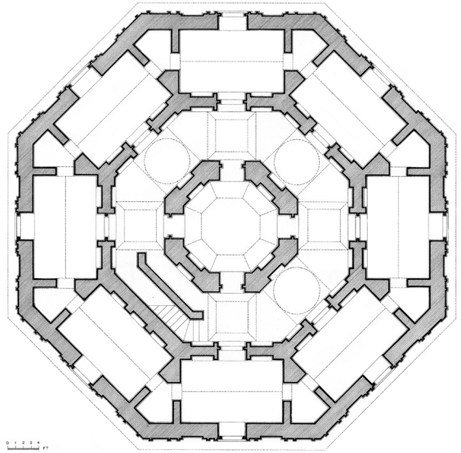
Sateraratna Temple and its surrounding landscape, 1982 © DoA



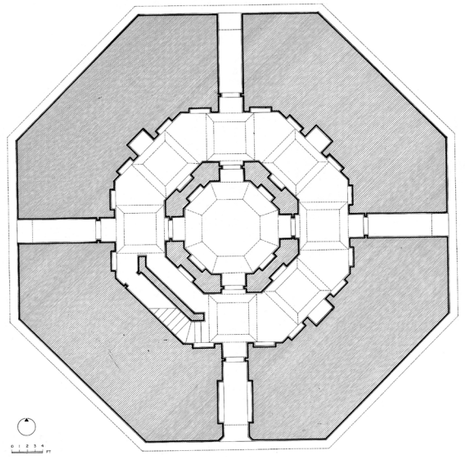
Sateraratna Temple (present condition), Cumilla District © DoA



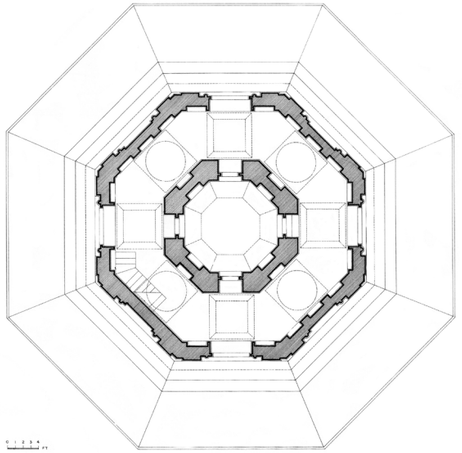
Third Floor



Second Floor

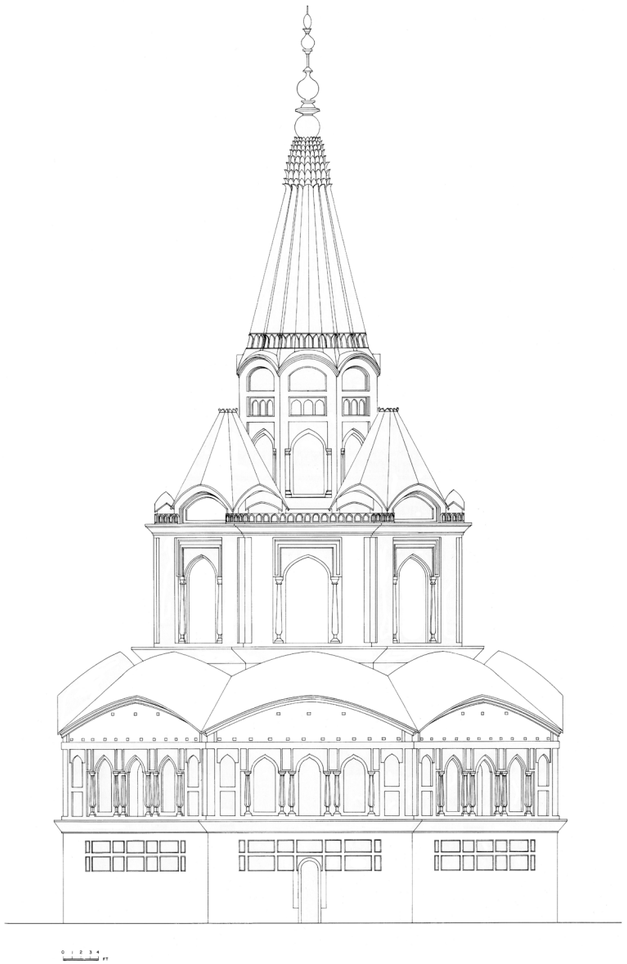


Ground Floor



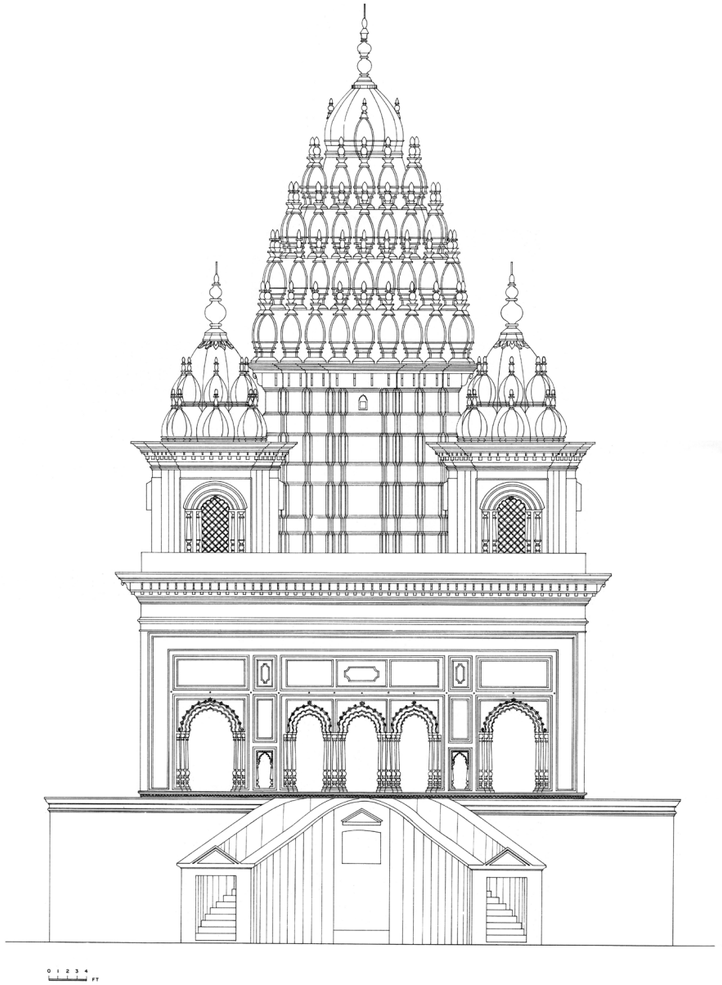
First Floor

Ground plan of Sateraratna Temple, Cumilla District (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

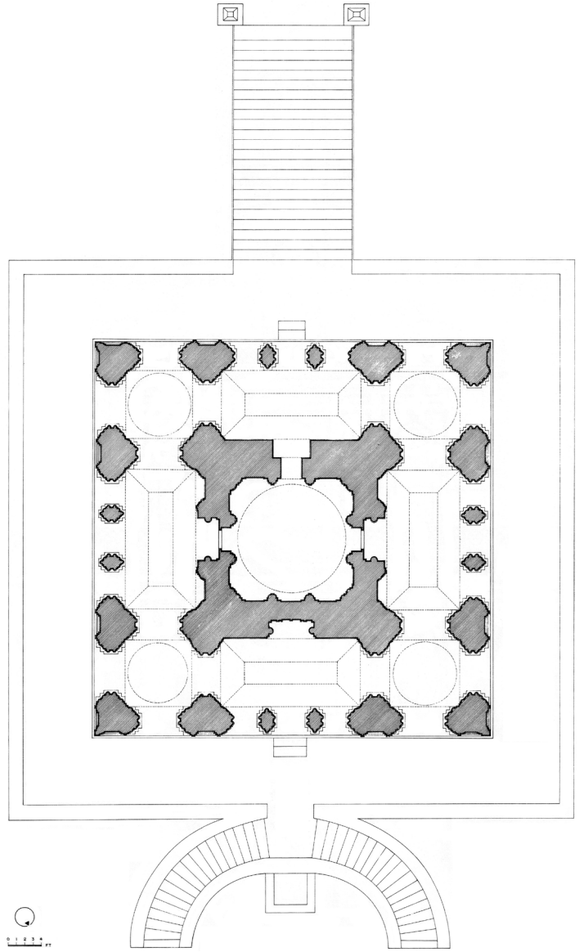


South elevation of Sateraratna Temple, Cumilla District (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

Puthia Baro Shiva Temple, Rajshahi District © DoA

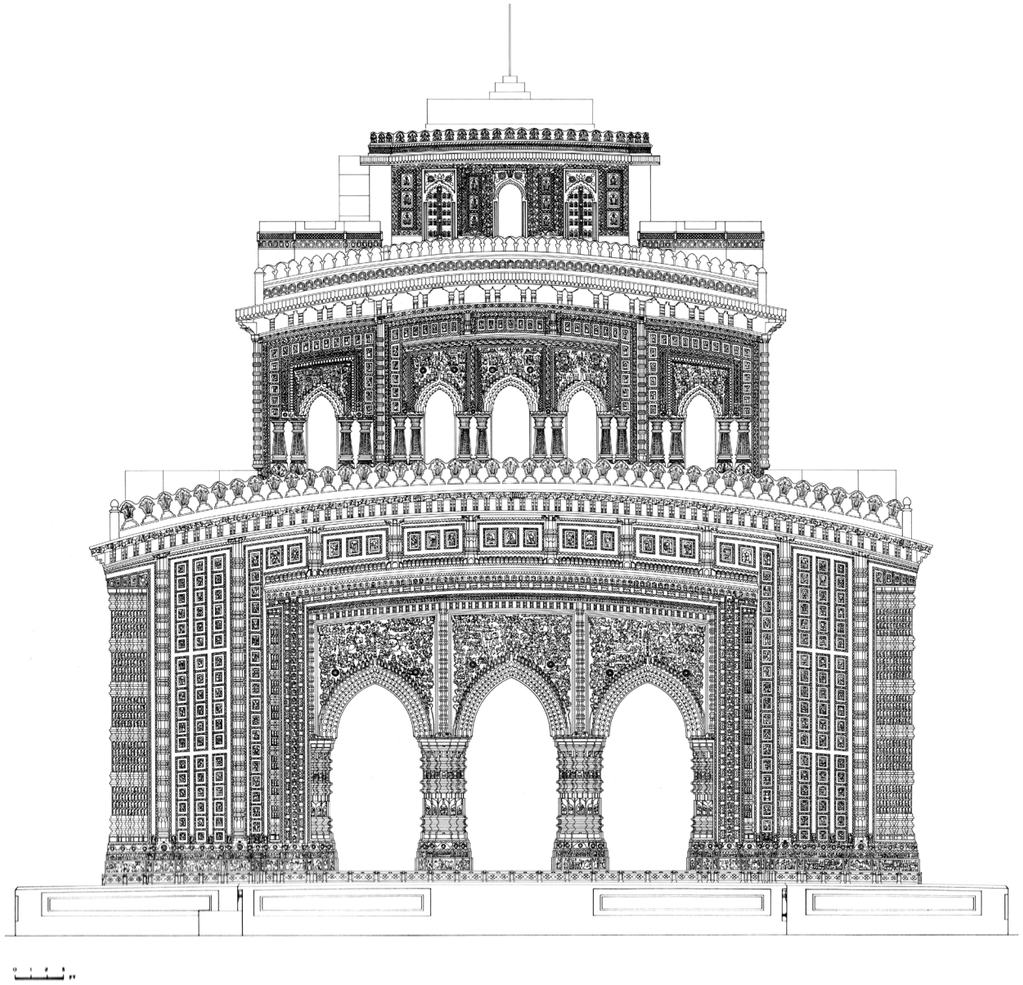


North elevation of Puthia Bara Shiva Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

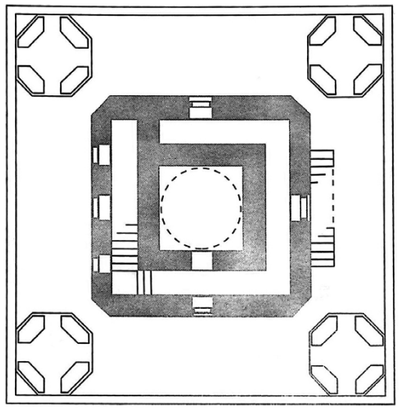


Ground plan of Puthia Bara Shiva Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

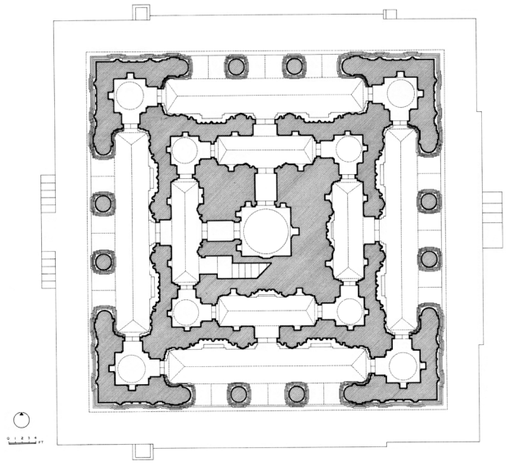
The front view of Kantajee Temple, Dinajpur District © DoA



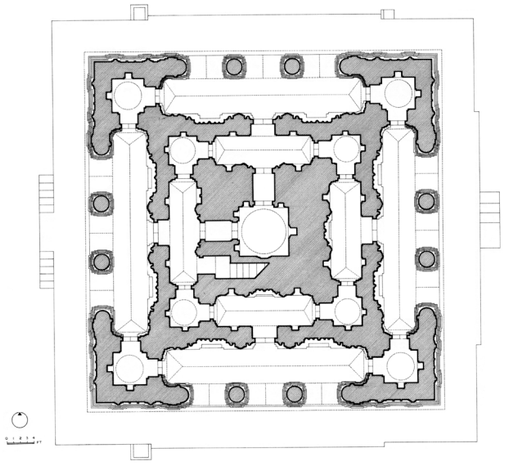
South elevation of Kantajee Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)



Second Floor (Source: Hoque and Hoque, 2005)



Ground floor (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)



First floor (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf, 1997)

Ground plan of Kantajee Temple

Chala temples

D

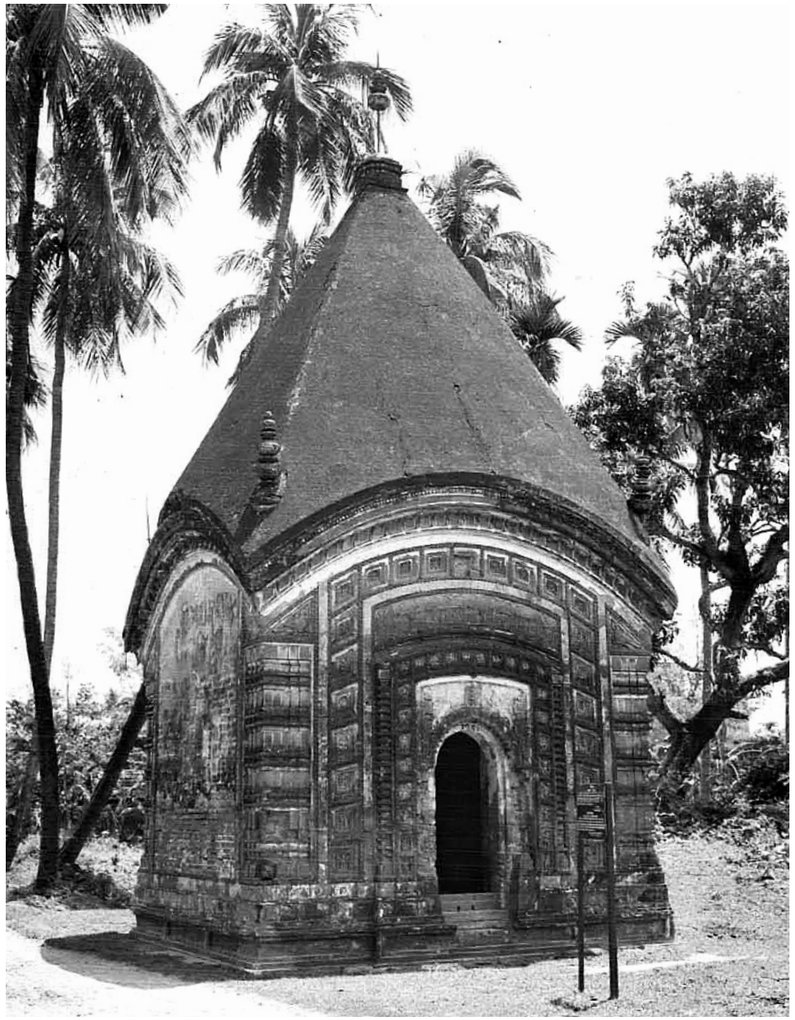
Although they share features with Bangla temples, the *Chala* temple category includes various composite forms with elaborations of the simple thatched-hut style of the rural Bengal temple.

Chau-chala/Char-chala

This sub-type is built following the simplest form of the domestic hut with four sides sloping to the cardinal directions, the curvilinear edge, and the gable end of the roof. The *Char-chala* temple is also called the 'single hut-type temple'.

Do-chala between Char-chala

This style in brick temple architecture is built as a building covered by an *Ek-bangla/Do-chala* acting as the roof between two *Char-chala* buildings



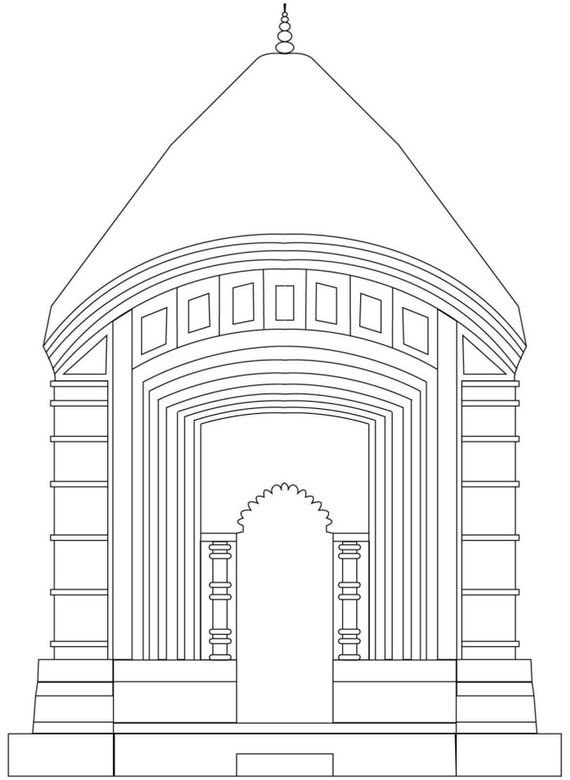
Puthia Chota Shiva Temple (before conservation), 1987, Rajshahi District © DoA

Puthia Chota Shiva Temple (after conservation), Rajshahi District © DoA

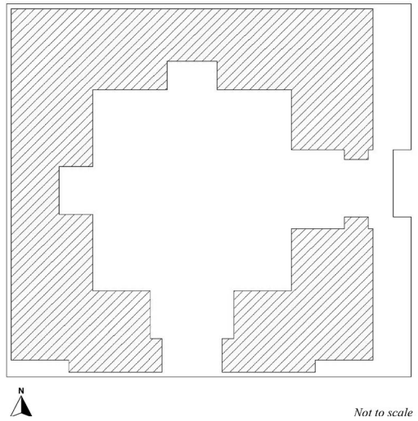
Puthia Gopala Temple, Rajshahi District © DoA

Hatikumrul Bara Shiva Temple, Sirajgonj District © DoA

Chaklanabish Shiva Temple, Narail District © DoA



South elevation of Chaklanabish Shiva Temple © DoA



Ground plan of Chaklanabish Shiva Temple © DoA

Dolmancha and Rashmancha

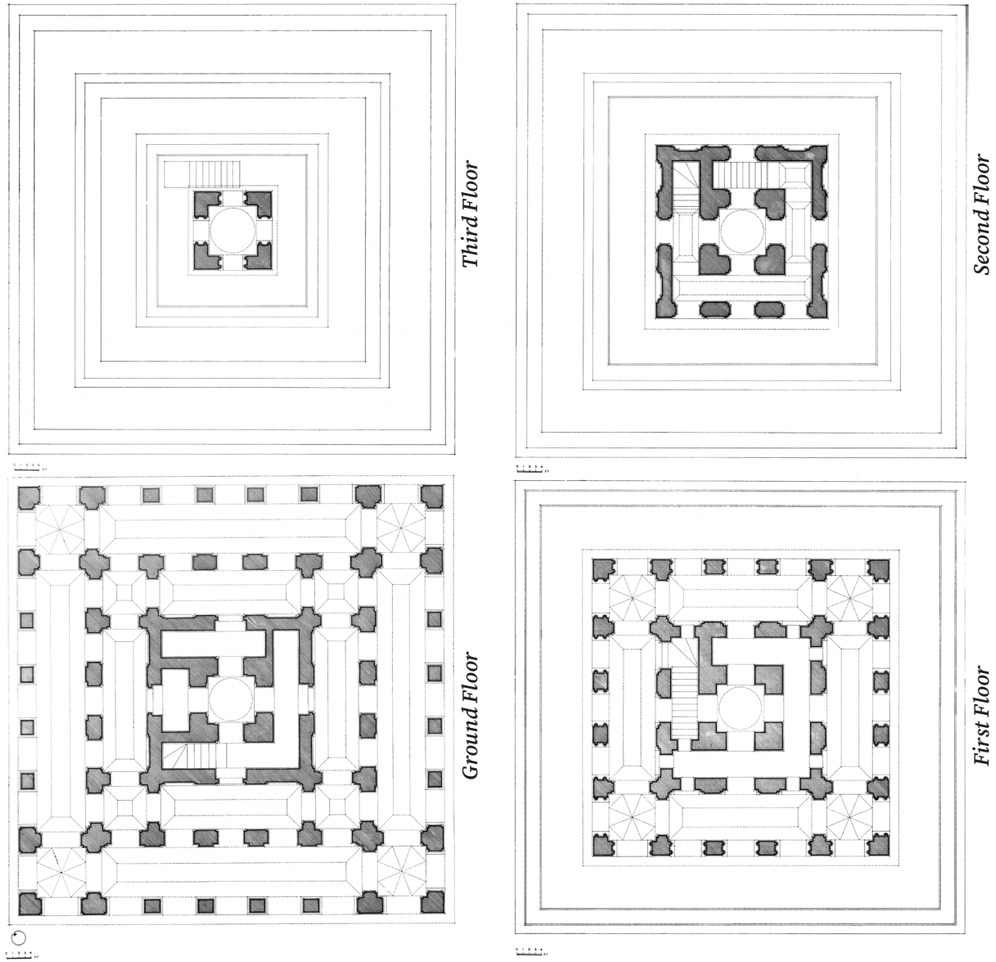
E

The layout and vertical design of these two types are often similar, with the former type smaller than the latter one. They have receding stepped or tiered vertical extensions, and they can be approached from four cardinal directions. They can be solid and decorated with various motifs like blind arches, turrets and curved cornices and may have a square ortho octagonal ground plan. Often, these types of temples are built upon a high plinth with arched openings in all directions. *Mancha* can be loosely translated as a podium, and dol and rash are two sacred festive rituals associated with the devotional love story between the Hindu God *Krishna* and Goddess *Radha*. The superstructure of this type follows the other temple forms of *rekha, chala* and *ratna*. The style of vertical accretion of the space with receding tiers can be traced back to the cruciform Buddhist temples of pre-thirteenth century CE Bengal.

Puthia Dola Temple (before conservation), 1987, Rajshahi District © DoA

Puthia Dola Temple (after conservation), Rajshahi District © DoA

South elevation of Puthia Dola Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf 1997)



Ground plan of Puthia Dola Temple (Source: Haque, Ahsan and Ashraf 1997)

Puthia Ratha Temple (before conservation), 1987, Rajshahi District © DoA

Puthia Ratha Temple (after conservation), Rajshahi District © DoA

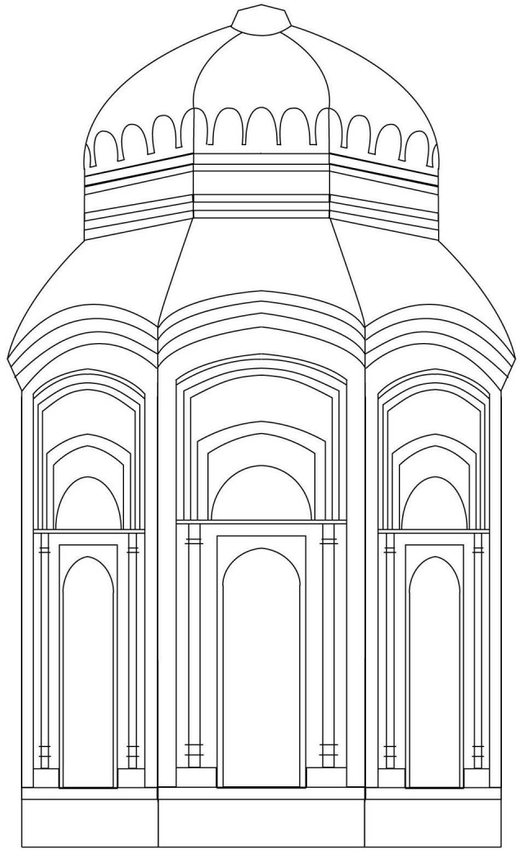
F Domed Temple

This style of brick temple architecture has octagonal lower parts and upper portions beginning with inverted lotuses, over which eight-sided pointed domes are placed on short drums, which are surrounded by rows of slightly curved lotus petals or curved merlon decorations. The following type of domed temples is noticed in Bengal as well as in Bangladesh:

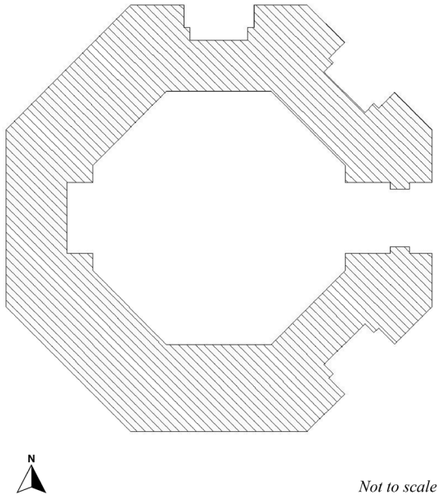
Inverted lotus domed temple

The temples are very small, and octagonal lower parts and upper portions begin with inverted lotuses, over which eight-sided pointed domes are placed on short drums, which are surrounded by rows of slightly curved lotus petals. Each side of the octagonal shaft of the temple contains ornamental blind arches except the entrance arch. These temples were commonly built in Bangladesh during the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries CE.

Chaklanabish Bhairaba Temple, Narail District © DoA



East elevation of Chaklanabish Bhairaba Temple © DoA



Not to scale

Ground plan of Chaklanabish Bhairaba Temple © DoA

Anomalous Combinations

G

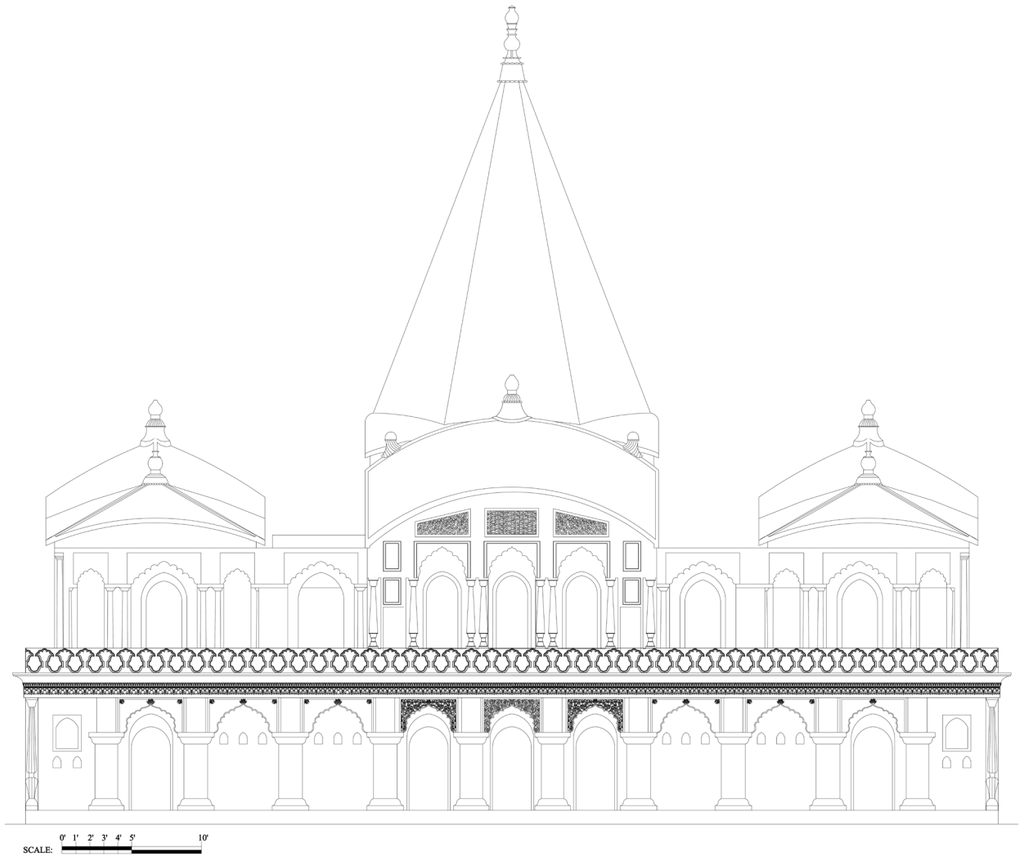
This class of the temples is a more later development combining often earlier components with the later colonial ones. There are several varieties of this combination. These varieties cannot be included in the regular classes with a combination of different components. They can be a combination of *flat-roofed*, with *chala* superstructure and/or additional *rekha shikhara* on the top. A combination of *ratna* and *chala,* rekha and *chala* are also visible. For example,

Flat-roofed with do-chala and char-chala upper storey and straight-edged pyramidical rekha:

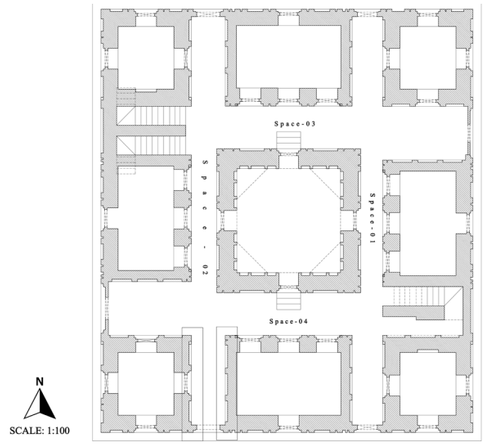
This specific sub-class represents double storied construction with the flat-roofed lower storey with one or more than one entrance. There are *chala* structures on the roof acting as the upper storey. They may be a combination of *char-chala* and *do-chala,* or any particular kind of *chala,* in frontal side or at four corners/at cardinal directions. Sometimes, modified *ratnas* may also be added to the corners. Rarely, a rekha is added on the top at the centre or behind the *chalas,* or on the top of a *garvhagriha* attached to the frontal flat-roofed component.

Khalaram Datar Temple (before conservation), 1985, Dhaka District © DoA

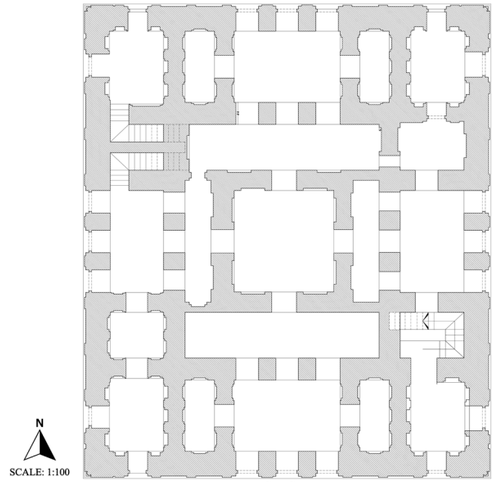
Khalaram Datar Temple (after conservation), Dhaka District © DoA



East elevation of Khelaram Datar Temple © DoA



First Floor



Ground Floor

Ground plan of Khelaram Datar Temple © DoA

Groupings

H

This category displays the assembling of similar types of separate built-edifices (e.g., *chala* or *bangla* types) with a common courtyard. They can be arranged on three sides of a square or rectangular courtyard.

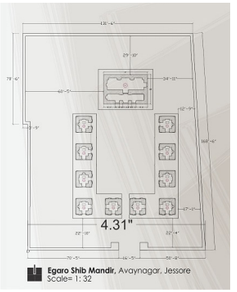
Central Temple of Eleven Shiva Temples (before conservation), Jashore District © DoA

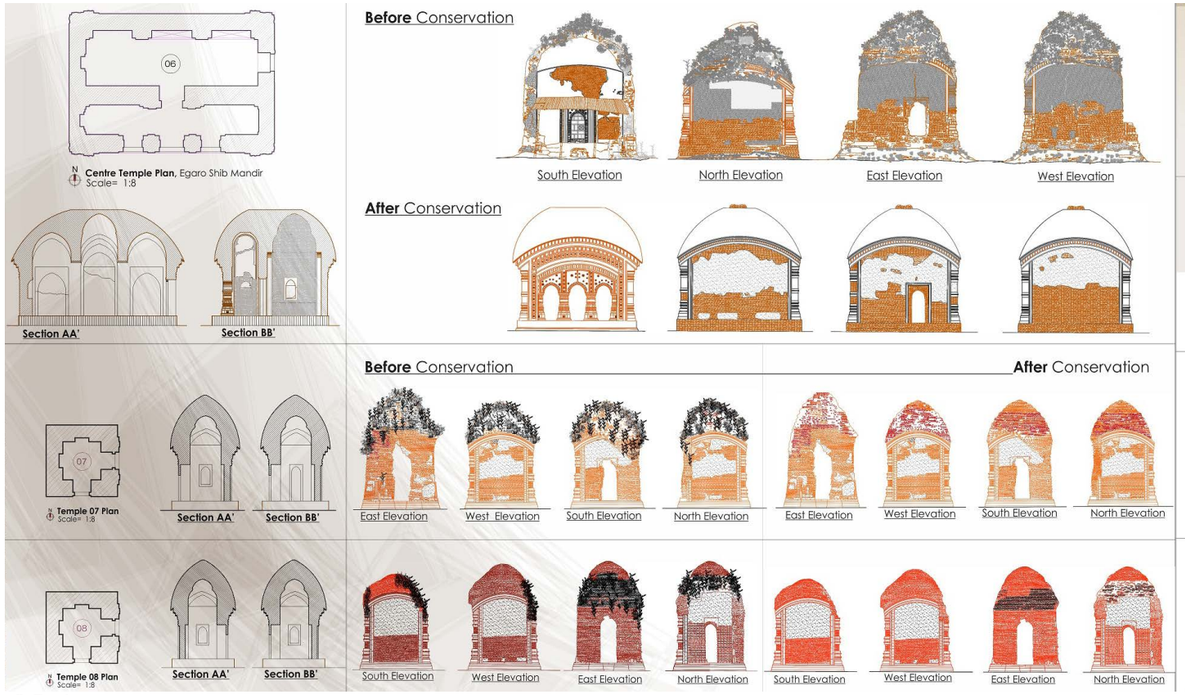
Central Temple of Eleven Shiva Temples (after conservation), Jashore District © DoA

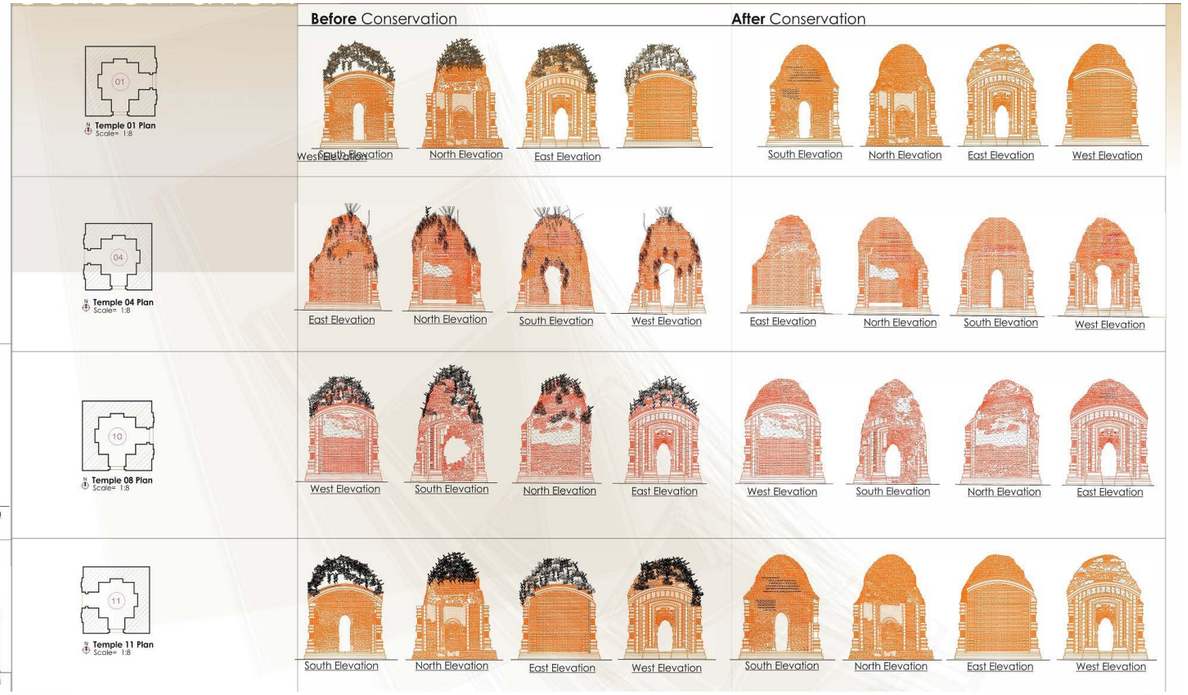
Eleven Shiva Temples (before conservation) © DoA

Eleven Shiva Temples (after conservation) © Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC)

Conservation Drawings of Eleven Shiva Temples (2015-2017)







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These temples are a specific type of religious architecture which represents the social, economic, religious, and artistic uniqueness as an ensemble and as a representation of the development of architectural style in a specific spatiotemporal segment. A table of twenty-nine temples or group of temples classified following David Mccutchion (1972) along with their locations are given below (Table-1):

Table 1: Categorization and locations of the protected temples selected for this book

Basic Serial code	Type	Sub-type	Serial code number	Name of the temple	Village, Upazila, District	Latitude and Longitude, or UTM coordinates
A	*Rekha*	*Straight-edged pyramidal*	A1	Handial Jagannath Temple	Handial, Chatmohar, Pabna	24°18'55.2"N 89°21'32"E
		Ridge Curvilinear	A2	Mathurapur Deul	Mathurapur, Baliakandi, Faridpur	23°33'42"N 89°37'41"E
			A3	Kodla Math (Ajodhya Math)	Kodla, Bagerhat Sador, Bagerhat	22°44'31.3"N 89°46'20.7"E
			A4	Archana Temple	Kantanagar, Kaharol, Dinajpur	25°47'28"N 88°40'01"E
B	*Bangla*	*Ek-bangla*	B1	Hatikumrul Bangla Ghara Temple	Hatikumrul, Ullapara, Sirajgonj	24°25'54.9"N 89°33'06.6"E
			B2	Puthia Chota Anhik Temple	Krishnapur, Puthia, Rajshahi	24°21'40.8"N 88°50'12.4"E
		Ek-bangla between two char-chala	B3	Puthia Bara Anhik Temple	Krishnapur, Puthia, Rajshahi	23°12'56.7"N 89°35'09.5"E
			B4	Raja Ram Temple	Khalia, Rajoir, Madaripur	23°13'23.5"N 90°00'15.8"E
		Jor-bangla	B5	Gopinath *Jor-Bangla* Temple	Kalachandpur, Pabna Sadar, Pabna	24°00'05.4"N 89°14'42.2"E
			B6	Chaklanabish *Jor-Bangla* Temple	Shalnagar, Lohagara, Narail	24°21'40.8"N 88°50'12.4"E
			B7	Kotakol *Jor-Bangla* Temple	Kotakol, Lohagara, Narail	23°07'28.1"N 89°40'08.7"E
C	*Ratna*	*Pancha-ratna*	C1	Puthia Pancharatna Govinda Temple	Krishnapur, Puthia, Rajshahi	24°21'41.8"N 88°50'13.4"E
			C2	Puthia Bara Shiva Temple	Krishnapur, Puthia, Rajshahi	24°21'50.4"N 88°50'13.3"E
		Nava-ratna	C3	Kantajee Temple	Kantanagar, Kaharol, Dinajpur	23°05'12.9"N 89°44'20.1"E
			C4	Hatikumrul Nava-ratna Temple	Hatikumrul, Ullapara, Sirajgonj	24°25'58.5"N 89°33'10.7"E
			C5	Teota Nava-ratna Temple	Teota, Shibaloya, Manikgonj	23°51'30.9"N 89°46'41.1"E
			C6	Annapurna Temple	Asashuni, Sador, Satkhira	22°42'14.2"N 89°05'17.3"E
			C7	Shamsundar Temple	Sonabaria, Kalaroya, Satkhira	22°52'35.2"N 88°59'07.4"E
		Saptadash-ratna	C8	Satera-ratna Temple (Jagannath Temple)*	Jagannathpur, Sador, Cumilla	23°27'44.1"N 91°12'39.1"E
D	*Chala*	*Char-chala*	D1	Puthia Gopala Temple	Krishnapur, Puthia, Rajshahi	24°21'44.6"N 88°50'05.5"E
			D2	Puthia Chota Shiva Temple	Krishnapur, Puthia, Rajshahi	24°21'39.7"N 88°50'09.2"E
			D3	Chaklanabish Shiva Temple	Shalnagar, Lohagara, Narail	23°16'32.7"N 89°38'14.0"E
			D4	Hatikumrul Bara Shiva Temple	Hatikumrul, Ullapara, Sirajgonj	24°25'54.9"N 89°33'06.6"E
E	*Dolmancha/ Rashmancha*	*Dolmancha*	E1	Chaklanabish Dola Temple	Shalnagar, Lohagara, Narail	23°16'32.7"N 89°38'14.4"E
			E2	Puthia Dola Temple	Krishnapur, Puthia, Rajshahi	24°21'46.6"N 88°50'14.3"E
		Rashmancha	E3	Puthia Ratha Temple	Krishnapur, Puthia, Rajshahi	24°21'49.9"N 88°50'14.4"E
F	Domed	*Inverted lotus domed*	F1	Hatikumrul Chota Shiva Temple	Hatikumrul, Ullapara, Sirajgonj	24°25'59.5"N 89°33'10.5"E
			F2	Chaklanabish Bhairaba Temple	Shalnagar, Lohagara, Narail	23°16'32.3"N 89°38'14.1"E
G	Anomalous combina-tions	*Flat-roofed with do-chala and char-chala upper storey and straight edged pyramidical rekha*	G1	Khalaram Datar Temple	Kalakopa, Nawabgonj, Dhaka	23°39'35.6"N 90°08'45.4"E
H	Groupings	*Char-chala*	H1	Egaro Shiva Temples (Eleven Shiva Temples)	Abhayanagar, Abhayanagar, Jashore	24°26'00.6"N 89°33'10.4"E

** There is disagreement about identifying this temple as 'saptadasharatna', as the morphology does not reflect the conventional standards of ratna temples. Established by the royal lineage of Tripura (in present India), this temple was mentioned by David McCutchion in two separate sub-categories. He included the temple in the 'saptadasha-ratna' sub-category (1972: 55) as well as in the 'Octagonal pinnacled' sub-category of the main 'Octagonal Temples' (and more than eight sides)' category (1972: 60). He contends, 'In East Bengal, spires and projecting chālā huts may constitute the ratnas, as the octagonal Jagannātha temple of Comilla' (McCutchion 1972: 55). Textual sources like Krishnamala, written by the end of eighteenth century CE as the biography of the patron of this temple King Krishnakirsor Manikya clearly mentions the temple as a saptadasharatha temple (Ramganga 1995: 204). The discrepancy between modern stylistic and morphometric typology and textual description needs to be considered in the context of the typological nomenclature of this temple. The debate on whether this temple can be identified as a saptadasharatna temple, or can not be resolved in this book.*

Basic Temple Types
1. Rekha
2. Bangla
3. Ratna
4. Chala
5. Dolmancha/Rashmancha
6. Domed
7. Flat-Roofed
8. Groupings

1. Mathurapur Deul
2. Kodla math (Ajodhya Math)
3. Handial Jagannath Temple
4. Hatikumrul Bangla Ghara Temple
5. Puthia Chota Anhik Temple
6. Puthia Bara Anhik Temple
7. Raja Ram Temple
8. Gopinath *Jor-Bangla* Temple
9. Chaklanabish *Jor-Bangla* Temple
10. Kotakol *Jor- Bangla* Temple
11. Puthia Pancha-ratna Govinda Temple
12. Puthia Bara Shiva Temple
13. Kantajee Temple
14. Hatikumrul Nava-ratna Temple
15. Teota Nava-ratna Temple
16. Annapurna Temple
17. Shamsundar Temple
18. Satera-ratna Temple (Jagannath Temple)
19. Puthia Gopala Temple
20. Puthia Chota Shiva Temple
21. Chaklanabish Shiva Temple
22. Hatikumrul Bara Shiva Temple
23. Chaklanabish Bhairaba Temple
24. Chaklanabish Dola Temple
25. Puthia Dola Temple
26. Puthia Ratha Temple
27. Hatikumrul Chota Shiva Temple
28. Khalaram Datar Temple
29. Egaro Shiva Temples (Eleven Shiva Temples)
30. Archana Temple

Eantanglement of river and the temples: the dieites of Kantajee temple journey by a boat to the temple of Dinajpur Rajbari every year during the raas festival. They are taken through the Dhepa River to the east of the Kantajee Temple
© https://www.facebook.com/kantajiutemple/photos/pb.100064335085996.-2207520000./2670943683198697/?type=3

The intersections of

multilayered pasts:

the untold aspects of heritage

These temples of Bangladesh represent the entanglement of terracotta art, narratives, regional traditions, landscape, and social history. As it has been mentioned earlier, these intersectionality and entanglements are often neglected in the established research practices of art and architectural history in which these monuments are reduced into isolated architectural and artistic productions and presented essentially as reified examples of past glory and achievements (see, Ahmed and Chowdhury 2005; Biswas and Hoque 1995; Dutta 1975).

One of the most outstanding features of the temples belonging to these periods is the profuse and planned articulation of their external surface, and sometimes their internal surface, with terracotta plaques depicting themes and stories of both secular and religious types. The narratives of the epics, like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and the stories from the life of *Radha-Krishna* or incarnations of the Hindu God Vishnu were told by the medium of terracotta plaques

Terracotta art at a pillar of Kantajee Temple © DoA

Terracotta plaques depicting a complex mythological scene at Kantajee Temple, Dinajpur District © DoA

Terracotta art depicting a zamindar enjoying a river cruise on a crescent-shaped boat and floral pattern at Kantajee Temple © DoA

(Gill 2007a, 2007b; Mitchel 1983; Ray 2013; Ghosh 2020, 2005a, 2005b; Hoque and Hoque 2005, 2020). As Ray (2016a, 2015a) has shown many of these terracotta plaques are systematically placed on the outer surface, above the plinth, entrance, and on the pillars to depict and narrate various stories from the life of *Sri Krisna* and the *leela* of *Radha-Krisna* which got centrality in the *Gaudiya Vaisnavite* traditions. They were not primarily used as artistic production. Rather, these narrations through terracotta are possibly entangled to the worshipers, and the worship, connected to the representation of the divine as well as the mundane in terms of the power, authority, piety, and status of the patrons. The ecstatic dancing figures in their postures are taken directly from the processions in the public spaces popularized by Sri Chaitanyadeva and Sri Nityananda in the initial days of the *Gaudiya Vaisnavite* movements.

Contemporary characters, features, and stories like the merchant boats, naval fleets, foreign traders, lives of the landlords or *zamindars*, along with erotic scenes were represented in these narratives. Temples like Kantajee (C3), Hatikamrul Nava-ratna Temple, (C4) and the temples of the Puthia cluster (C1, B2, B3, E3) have elaborate tales told through the terracotta plaques on their facades from the plinth level up to the cornice. Many other temples like the *Jor-bangla* and *chala* types have terracotta plaques depicting religious and secular themes on panels above their arched entrances, pillars

and corner pilasters. Because of the entwinement of terracotta plaques and bricks in the temples, many art historians identify these temples as terracotta temples even though not all of them have similar usages of terracotta decorations. Many temples are devoid of any terracotta plaque or often, very few terracotta plaques. Compared to the entire ensemble of thousands of such temples, the proportion of terracotta-decorated temples is very few. The term – terracotta temple – therefore, is a misnomer. In the study of these temples, fieldwork-based extensive recording of temples in the works of McCutchion (1972, 1967), and Sanyal (n.d) are hardly found. Santra (1972) pointed at some of the problems with the cataloging and documentation of these temples in the absence of systematic and intensive field-based studies, while many of the temples without any terracotta decoration or with simple demeanor are often ignored by the scholars. An unbiased study of these temples with a transdisciplinary methodology and recording system (see, Ray 2015a for an alternative recording procedure) can shed light upon the complex conditions, processes, and contexts of these temples.

The significance of these terracotta plaques, nevertheless, does not diminish with their narratives, stylistic attributes, spatial patterns, and the subjects they portray in the plastic medium are the focus of the interest of many studies. Their styles reflect different schools of clay artists during this period and their mobilities. Along with terracotta plaques and terracotta ornamentation through replicating various floral motifs, stucco plasters were widely used in many of these temples for representing figures and themes on external and internal surfaces.

Temples and their intimate association with waterbody/tanks. Puthia, Rajshahi District
© Nasir Khan Saikat *(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shiva_Temple,_Puthia,_Rajshahi_NK_(1).jpg), „Shiva Temple, Puthia, Rajshahi NK (1)“, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/legalcode*

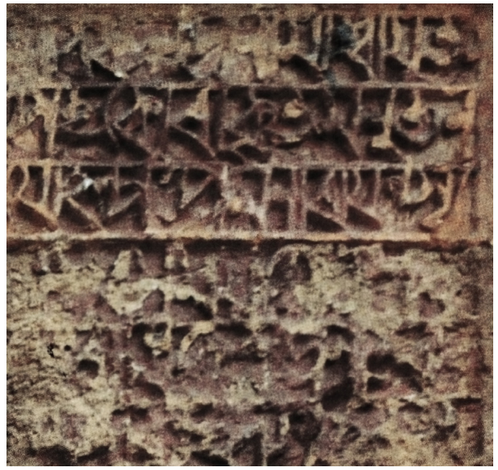
The temple building activities from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century CE did not have a linear and simple social, religious, and political context. Neither were these temples patronized with homogenous motives, conditions, landscapes, and class of people. Several temples have preserved dedicatory inscriptions with the name of the patron, architect, and purpose of the inscription. Most of these inscriptions are on terracotta, with a few on stones and other materials. Hiteshranjan Sanyal has shown that the temple-building activities and their patronage went through changes. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE, temples were constructed and patronized by the members of the families, castes and classes who did not belong to traditional elite landlords and upper castes (see, Sanyal n.d; Santra 2015).

Table 2: Classified temples with their tentative date and patron/founders. It has to be noted that the name of the patron and the date of the temples, in many cases, are based upon previous sources and oral history in the absence of a dedicatory inscription. The dates have been referred to in terms of the century considering the initial phases of usage also.

Basic Serial code for class	Serial code for the sub-class	Name of the temple	Residing Deity	Tentative date of foundation and initial usage	Patron/Founder
A	A1	Handial Jagannath Temple	*Jagannath*	c. sixteenth-seventeenth cen. CE	Renovated by Bhavani Prasad in 1590 (?)
	A2	Mathurapur Deul	Abandoned, Commemorative (?)	c. seventeenth – eighteenth cen. CE	Sangram Singh/Man Singha
	A3	Kodla math (Ajodhya Math)	Abandoned, Commemorative (?)	c. seventeenth - eighteenth cen. CE	A Brahmin with the surname– Sharma/ Pratapaditya
B	B1	Hatikumrul Bangla Ghara Temple	*Shiva* (?) Abandoned	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Ramnath Bhaduri
	B2	Puthia Chota Anhik Temple	*Radha-Govinda*	c. seventeenth -nineteenth cen. CE	Hemantakumari Devi, wife of landlord Pareshnath
	B3	Puthia Bara Anhik Temple	*Radha-Govinda*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Hemantakumari Devi, wife of landlord Pareshnath
	B4	Raja Ram Temple	Abandoned	c. seventeenth - eighteenth cen. CE	Raja Ram Roy
	B5	Gopinath Jor-bangla Temple	*Krishna*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Brajamohan Crori
	B6	Chaklanabish Jor-bangla Temple	*Govinda*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Ramchandra Chaklanabish
	B7	Kotakol Jor-bangla Temple	*Govinda*	c. seventeenth – eighteenth cen. CE	Sudharam (Dev) Sarkar
C	C1	Puthia Govinda Temple	*Radha-Govinda*	c. seventeenth -nineteenth cen. CE	Puthia Zamindar Family
	C2	Puthia Bara Siva Temple	*Shiva*	c. seventeenth – nineteenth cen. CE	Puthia Zamindar Family
	C3	Kantajee Temple	*Krishna* (Kantajeu)	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Prannath Ray and Ramnath Ray
	C4	Hatikumrul Nava-ratna Temple	*Dolmancha* (assoicated with the rituals of *Radha-Krishna* worship)	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Ramnath Bhaduri
	C5	Teota Nava-ratna Temple	*Dolmancha* (assoicated with the rituals of *Radha-Krishna* worship)	c. nineteenth cen. CE	Teota zamindar family

Basic Serial code for class	Serial code for the sub-class	Name of the temple	Residing Deity	Tentative date of foundation and initial usage	Patron/Founder
	C6	Annapurna Temple	*Annapurna*	c. nineteenth cen. CE	Bishnuram Chakravarty
	C7	Shaymsundar Temple	*Shyamsundar*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Hariram Das/ Durgapriya Chowdhury
	C8	Satera-ratna Temple	*Jagannath*	c. seventeenth – eighteenth cen. CE	King Ratnamanikya the second, and King Krisnokishor Manikya of Trupura Royal Family
D	D1	Puthia Gopala Temple	Gopal	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Puthia Zamindar Family
	D2	Puthia Chota Siva Temple	*Shiva*	c. nineteenth cen. CE	Puthia Zamindar Family
	D3	Chaklanabish Siva Temple	*Shiva*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Ramchandra Chaklanabish (?)
	D4	Hatikumrul Bara Siva Temple	*Shiva*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Ramnath Bhaduri
E	E1	Chaklanabish Dola Temple	*Dolmancha*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Ramchandra Chaklanabish (?)
	E2	Puthia Dola Temple	*Dolmancha*	c. nineteenth cen. CE	Puthia Zamindar Family
	E3	Puthia Ratha Temple	*Ratha* (Chariot) associated with Jagannath cult	c. nineteenth cen. CE	Puthia Zamindar Family
F	F1	Hatikumrul Chota Siva Temple	*Shiva*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Ramnath Bhaduri
	F2	Chaklanabish Bhairaba Temple	*Bhairaba*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Ramchandra Chaklanabish (?)
G	G1	Khalaram Datar Temple	Unconfirmed (Multiple deities ?)	c. nineteenth–twentieth cen. CE	Khelaram Data or Dutta
H	H1	Egaro Shiva Temples (Eleven Shiva Temples)	*Shiva*	c. eighteenth cen. CE	Nilkantha Ray (?)

Dedicatory inscription at Kantajee Temple © DoA (see Zakariah 2010: 127 for the reading of the inscription)



Dedicatory inscription at Puthia Govinda Temple © DoA

Dedicatory inscription at Puthia Chota Anhik Temple © DoA

Terracotta depicting hunting scene at Kantajee Temple © DoA

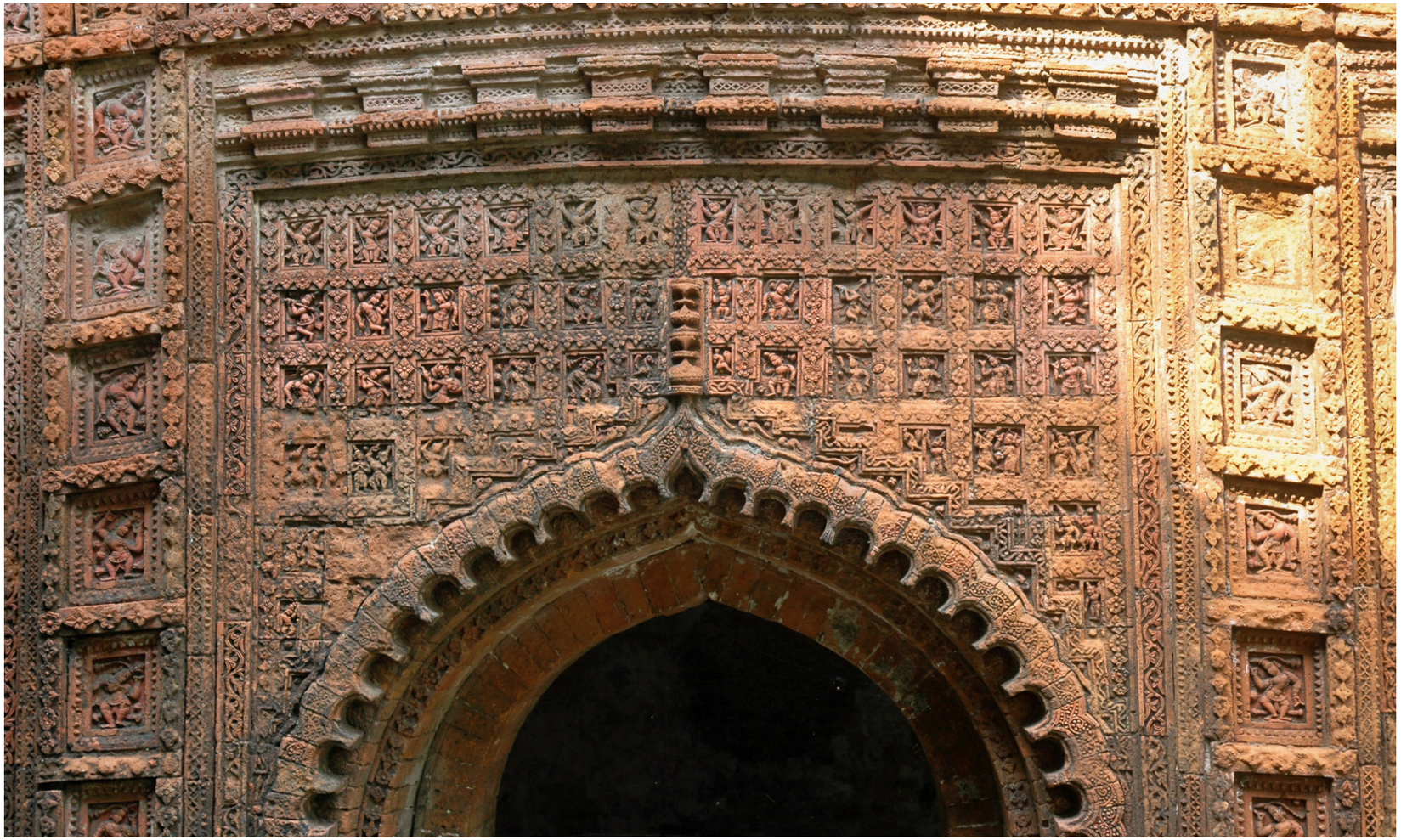
The vibrant trade and rural commercialization, new occupations and other social changes brought a shift in the economic status of some people belonging to a previously lower caste and class. The building of temples became one of several ways through which these people attempted to emulate the upper caste and attempted to find their place among the elites. Unfortunately, the lack of systematic archival research and dedicatory inscriptions in many of the temples in Bangladesh does not offer empirical evidence to corroborate the interpretation of Sanyal (n.d.) on a larger scale for the temples of present Bangladesh. There are, however, oral history and legends, as well as few inscriptions and other records, to corroborate the correspondence of temple building activities and socio-economic mobility. For example, the temples of Hatikamrul were constructed and patronized primarily by Ramnath Bhaduri, a *tehshildar* (a tax collection officer) under Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan (1717-1727 CE). He became rich and subsequently patronized the building of the temple. The oral history adds that he was a friend of Raja Ramnath Ray who patronized the construction of the Kantajee Temple and lent him money in exchange for Ramnath's help for the construction of a temple like Kantajee Temple. Like many other such cases, the patrons of these temples are imagined and memorized as kings (raja) or *zamindar* (landlords) irrespective of the past social status. Instead of treating the oral histories of temples and associated events as 'factual source', they can be addressed to understand the processes through which remembrance, memorialization, touristic narratives, and ritualistic performance change and add heritage values to these sacred monuments.

Terracotta depicting a palanquin scene at Kantajee Temple © DoA

In another way, the construction of the temples of Puthia was possibly influenced by the sharing of property in 1744 CE. Again, in the subsequent colonial period, Permanent Settlement by the British East India Company's colonial regime in 1791 had a profound and far-reaching impact upon the economic, social, and religious transformation in this region. Many lineages of *zamindars* (landlords) by inheritance lost their ownership and feudal economic and social status. A new class evolved by purchasing these lost lands and properties and they sought power, authority, and status like their predecessors. Among many acts of piety and benevolence, temple building turned into a conscious project for their purpose of seeking status in a caste society. Similar trends can be noticed in the case of the Shyamsundar Temple or Chaklanabish Jor-bangla Temple. In Bangladesh, because of the absence of serious archival research and systematic fieldwork, such propositions of Histeshranjan Sanyal (n.d) and Tarapada Santra (2015) are not explored and verified. The preliminary observations above, nevertheless, implicitly support Sanyal's thesis, and serious research can be conducted further for addressing the multifaceted meanings of these religious monuments as heritage products and as historical agents.

Similarly, as Tarapada Santra (2015) has shown, the reflection of various schools of artisans began to find their names mentioned in several dedicatory inscriptions by the end of

Terracotta art at the back side of Puthia Chota Anhik Temple © DoA



Terracotta art at the front side of Puthia Chota Anhik Temple © DoA

the Late Medieval period. Previously, lower caste status prohibited their memorization in the inscriptions. The changing economic situation, caste mobility, and rural commercialization possibly gave them the status to be mentioned in these inscriptions. Interestingly, he has also shown that apparently higher caste groups, which were not involved in the temple building activities as a hereditary occupation, were involved as the artisans of temple building.

It is possible to interpret how the relationship between the patrons and the mass people associated with the ritualistic and other activities of these temples were changing also. These temples also influenced, shaped, and refashioned the religious traditions of *Gaudiya Vaisnavism* in different ways. At the same time, the assimilations of various local gods and goddesses into the mainstream Hindu religious traditions took place through the mediation of these temple spaces. The temples were the non-human actors in their own right in the processes of such transformations and accommodation of different deities and worshippers when each temple of a cluster was the adobe of different deities. As it has already been mentioned in the early sections, a considerable number of temples were dedicated to *Shiva* or his other manifestations. Perception of *Shiva* in the popular domain of Bengal represents him as a common,

familial and callous man, often smoking weed. Except for a few texts (e.g, *Shivayana*, a narrative influenced by the mangal-kavya genre), the popularity of *Shaiva* cult cannot be attested by the textual sources. This is quite an opposite case in comparison to *Gaudiya* Vaisnavism. Ethnographic studies and archival research can show the complex dynamics of the popularity of *Shiva*, both as an almighty god and as a common man. The social and economic transformation mentioned above might also be a factor for the growing number of temples dedicated to *Shiva* (Ray 2022).

The cultural biography of these temples is defined in terms of the processes of transformation they went through from the day of their establishment to their survival to date. This temporality of these monuments, thereby, adds a significant aspect to the historical as well as heritage value of these temples. Communities were deeply related to these temples and have memorized them in the form of legends and storytelling, and in different intangible narratives and rituals. These narratives, of course, are not factual and are open to interpretations. They, however, represent the manyfold ways the monuments are entangled in the public memory

Worshippers and tourists at Kantajee Temple © DoA

Devotees worshipping at the Kantajee Temple © DoA

and their actions to associate (or dissociate) them from the monuments in the form of collective rituals, fairs, festivals, and economic activities. Even when some of the temples are ruined and abandoned or are used for other purposes, they are deeply connected to the popular and community memories irrespective of their religious orientations. A few of them can act as continuing living entity embodying the past community mobilities. The memories perpetuate at the present, and the local people narrate them as acts of piety and achievement of the local landlords (e.g., Kantajee Temple). As a sacred space, the monument and surrounding landscape also enhance different layers to the complex relationship of the memorializing, performative remembrance, and festivities in the public domains.

Many of the temples like Kantajee, Hatikamrul, and Puthia attract a significant number of tourists every year. Their circulation in visual forms in social media also creates and recreates their meaning and value as heritage sites. Many local people prepare short and long documentaries by the easily available smartphones and digital cameras and post them on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. The these monuments as historic and heritage sites in social media and the internet open various modalities in making these religious monuments accessible to the wider audience around the world. These locally made visuals often add several additional meanings and create

new narratives which influence the consumption of these temples as heritage sites. Many of the living temples have a direct impact upon the local economy, especially when they become a focus of touristic activities as well as different annual ritual gatherings and festivals.

It is just a cursory elaboration of the ways these temples can be perceived and interpreted to understand the past and the relatedness of the past to the present. In addition to the significance of these temples as representations of the unique clay art traditions of Bengal and as exceptional technological and artistic work, they can be a medium to delve into multiple meanings and historicity in popular, social, economic, and public domains.

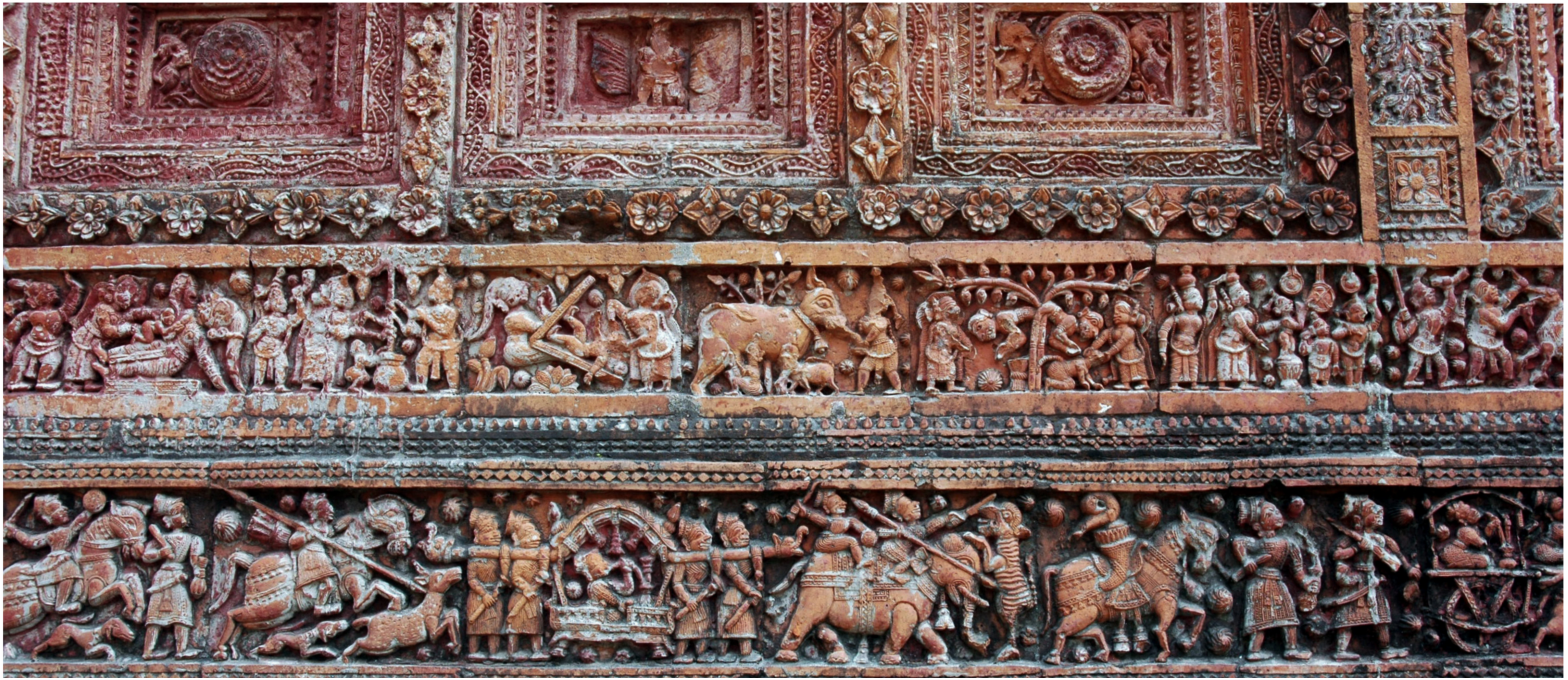
Terracotta plaques at front side of the Chaklanabish Jor-bangla Temple © DoA

Terracotta art at front middle panel of Puthia Bara Anhik Temple © DoA

Terracotta art at front left panel of Puthia Bara Anhik Temple © DoA

Terracotta art at the front side of Puthia Chota Shiva Temple © DoA

Spatial pattern of Jor-bangla temples of Narail represents their close relationship with rivers (Source: Ray 2016c)

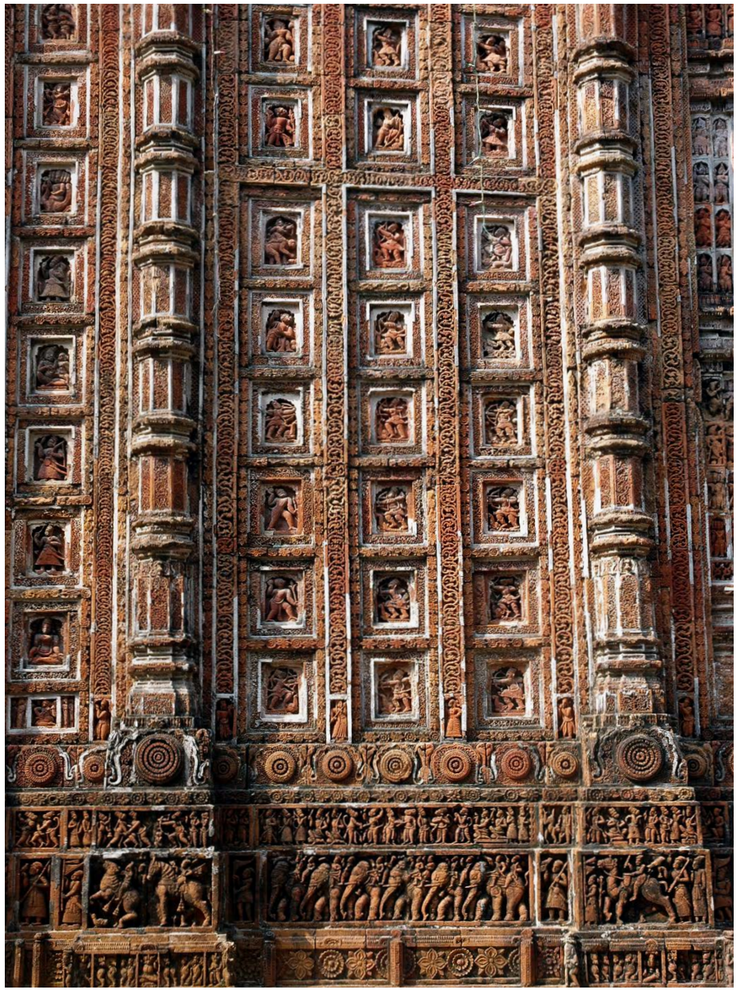


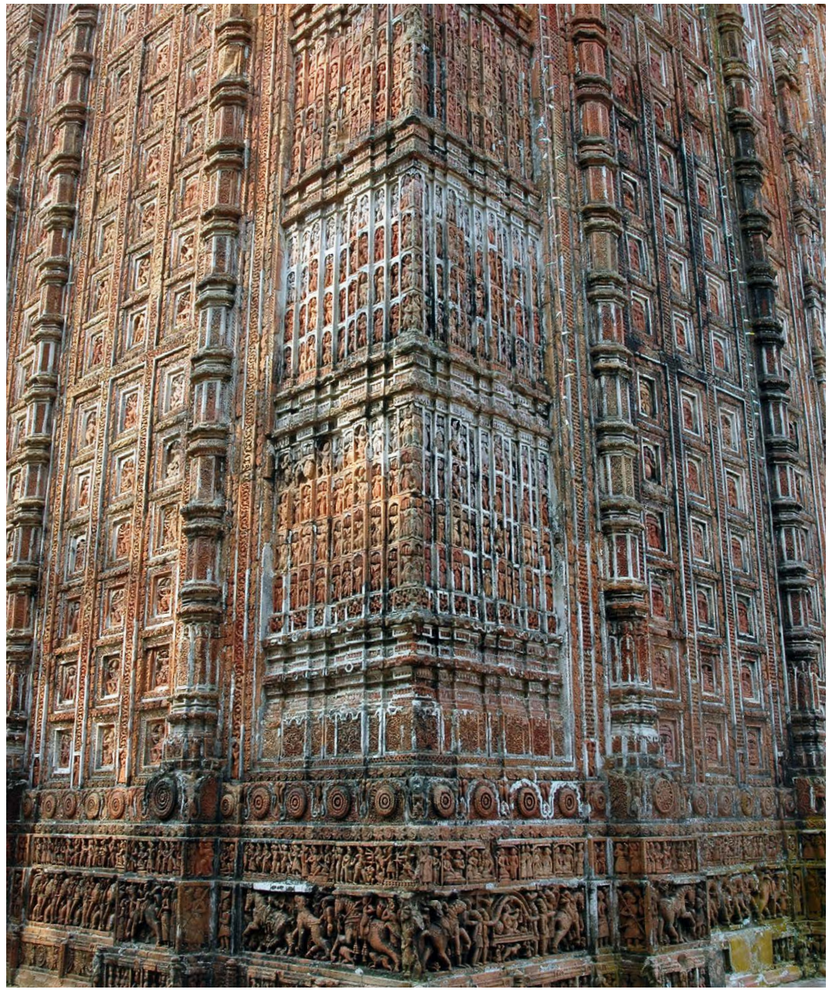
Terracotta art at the front side of Puthia Govinda Temple © DoA

Khalaram Datar Temple, Dhaka District © DoA

Outstanding universal value

of the temples as a potential World Heritage property





Terracotta art at the exterior walls of Kantajee Temple © DoA

The brick temples of the Late Medieval and Colonial period in Bangladesh often occur in a clustered spatial group within a specific locality suggesting the centrality of the space for the patrons. Many temples, besides, have isolated or discrete existences.

These temples represent a period of Bangladesh (and West Bengal, India), known popularly as 'Bengal' during the Mughal and Colonial period, which witnessed the transformation, evolution, and continuity in various aspects of society, culture, religion and economic life. The origin of this genre of temple architecture intimately connected to the terracotta art was conditioned by these transformations which were, partially, a result of the exchange of artistic ideas, techniques, and forms over a wide region. The abundant clay, as construction material in the form of bricks and as a plastic medium of artistic expression and style, gave rise to specific architectural morphology and style along with plastic art. The origin of these formal and stylistic traditions can be traced back to the third–fourth centuries BCE. These ensembles of the temple, both as a built space and as artistic expressions, had certain features which were distinct from the antecedent traditions.

The techniques and formal attributes of Muslim architecture, especially the arcuate system of vaulting and the domes, inspired the overall humble external outlook of these temples. Unlike,

the north and south Indian counterparts of this period, these temples were not vertically extended. Construction material had a role to play in the demeanor of these built forms. The humble and populist *Vaisnavite* movement, which sought to bring changes in the contemporary caste- based hierarchical society dominated by the Brahmins, and celebrated *bhakti* or devotion in more democratic participation from all spheres of the society, have had implications upon the visually not conspicuous and more mundane representation of these temples. The interchange among various religious, architectural, and artistic traditions resulted in this extraordinary innovation of form and style possible. The *ratna* type of temples assimilated the corner towers and small kiosks from Muslim religious architecture. The replication of traditional thatched huts of the region was also initiated by the Muslim patrons in this region of Bengal. The temple builders and the patrons were influenced by this successful improvisation, and they gave the replication of traditional Bengali hut a more heterogeneous form and meaning by creating a variety of *chala* types and by mixing them with other types also. The *Jor-bangla* type of temples deserves special mention, in this exceptionally innovative and exquisitely creative enterprise of the temple builders and clay artists. By joining two huts and by using their surfaces for articulating and representing the sacred and

Terracotta plaque depicting scene of travel by bullock cart and elephant; a horse with a quiver attached to the saddle at Kantajee Temple © DoA

Terracotta art at the front side of Puthia Govinda Temple © DoA

mundane world of being, the Bengali clay artists not only showed their highest imaginative capabilities, but they also transformed the temple into a space of collective celebration of the indivisibility of the divine and the mundane, according to the *Gaudiya vaisnava* philosophies and rituals. The performative aspect of this devotional tradition by *kirton* (a genre of singing and dancing by uttering the names or *leela* of *Radha-Krishna* performed by the followers) was reflected in the content of the terracotta plaques as well as in the open space in front of the façade that was meticulously ornamented with the stories and narratives. Many such temples still construct temporary sheds during the performances and are inspired from the permanent *natmandapa* (a separate built-space in front of the temple for various performances) of some other temples. In this sense, the space around the temple is as important as the monument as places of performative rituals of different religious sects.

Other varieties, such as the inverted lotus domed temples, are a vivid sign of the development of specific monumental forms with the syncretic and mutual exchange between various creative traditions – Muslim style, which brought central Asian, Persian, and even, European styles, techniques, and forms during the Mughal period in Bengal; Hindu-Buddhist styles from the pre-Medieval period; and various components and styles from the colonial period. The alluvial and riverine landscape of Bengal witnessed the rise of this ensemble suggesting a distinctive regional style of creative fusions and innovations of artistic content and form in constructing narratives from the epics, local purana, popular narratives of the lives of *Radha-Krishna* as well as the subjects and events happening in and around the region. Many of these forms, like the *bangla* or *chala* style, built spaces, made a significant influence upon the Imperial and regional architectural

development during the Mughal period in the north and central India. The movement of the artists and artisans was coincidental to the dynamic and changing social and economic mobilities of various groups in an inter and supra-regional context.

Interestingly, many of these temples are living religious monuments. They are being worshipped by the local Hindu communities. Several temples are considered important pilgrimage destinations during specific sacred occasions. For example, the temples of Putia or Kantajee temple become centres of pilgrimage and worship during the celebration of events that are considered very significant in the life of *Radha-Krisna*. The temples with *Shiva lingams* are visited by the devotees during the auspicious occasions of the worship of *Shiva*. Simultaneously, some temples are regarded as the abode of local Hindu deities, contributing to the preservation and continuity of the ritualistic traditions of the local Hindu deities.

As has been pointed out above, this ensemble of temples represents a category of monuments and architectural styles comprising varieties of formal and stylistic types. They emerged and transformed in a specific social, religious, and regional context. Evidence of assimilation and fusion of various elements, forms and styles are explicit in these temples. The ornamentation and storytelling through the plastic artistic medium such as terracotta and stucco were inseparable from the architectural form and style. The incorporation of plastic and locally available clay and stucco as an essential part of brick-built monumental unity with lucid, humble, and exquisite intricacy of symbolic space gave birth to an ensemble of buildings that became centres of power, devotion, and celebration of the love of the divine in the earthly world. The outstanding multi-layered functional and symbolic aspects of these buildings deserve a unique status on a global scale.

Terracotta depiction of Ras leela of Radha-Krishna on Kantajee Temple (Source: Hoque and Hoque, 2005)

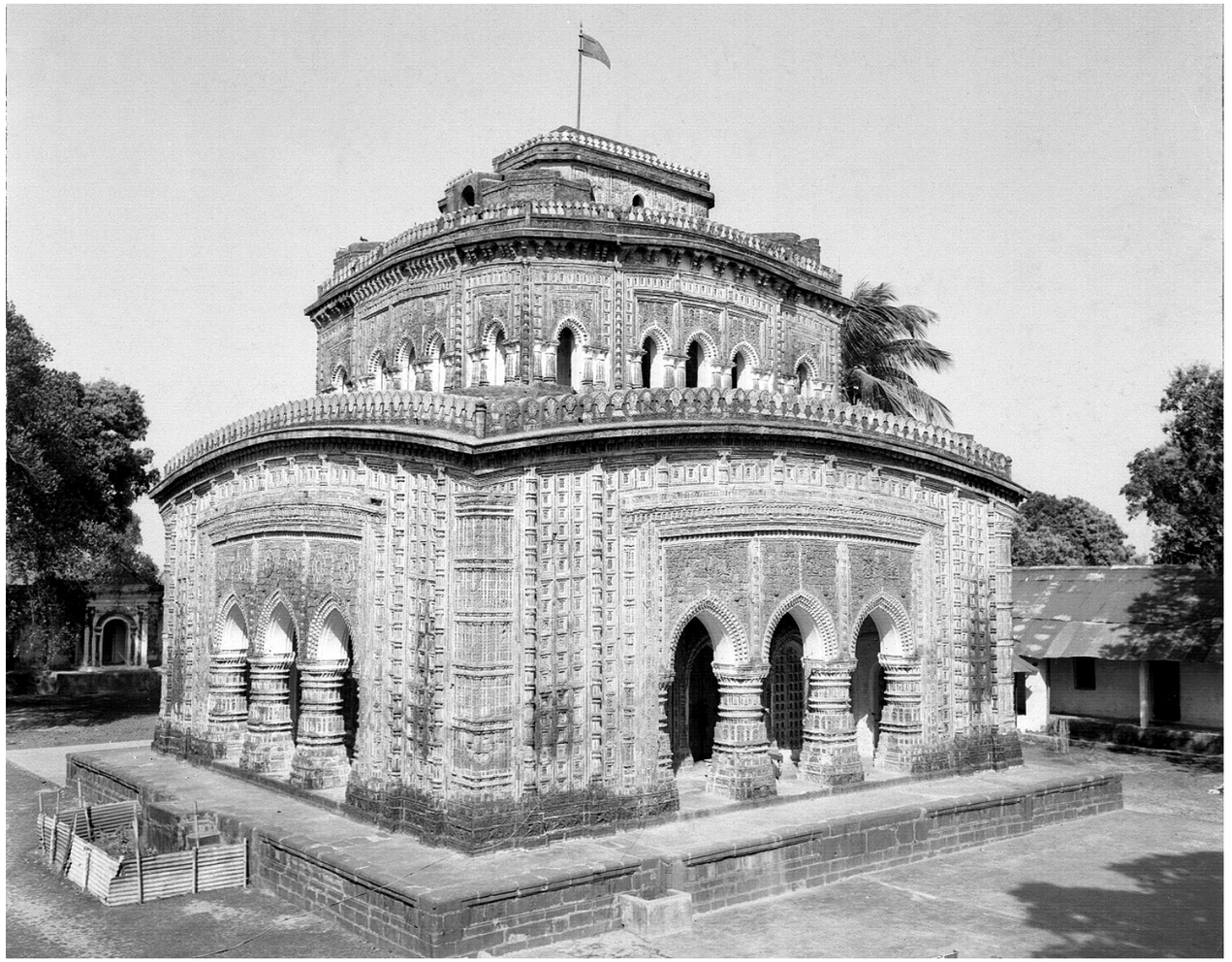
Puthia Dola Temple, Rajshahi District © DoA

Present condition

of the temples

All these temples have maintained their original character to a certain extent. Most of them are listed as protected monuments under the Antiquity Act of Bangladesh. The main construction materials – bricks and *lime-surki* mortar – have been kept untouched in most cases.

As many of these temples are living religious monuments and community participation is inevitable in the process of performing religious rituals, a few temples have faced intervention with later additions of extensions and auxiliary buildings in adjacent areas in the late 19th or early 20th century CE. According to the Nara Document, these renewals and renovations must be accepted as authentic as they were performed during the living periods of these monuments. Because of the population growth and scarcity of lands, several mosques have been encroached by the locals and some parts have been damaged or left uncared. The authenticity of the monuments along with their substance, function and primary purpose has largely remained unaltered.



Kantajee Temple (1987) © DoA

A few temples on the coastal belts are threatened by the effect of salinity and by the weathering of clay made bricks. The superstructures, especially the domes, are prone to damage. For a few temples, the terracotta plaques have been stolen or have been weathered because of salinity and bioturbation. The growth of plants has affected the solidity and endurance of superstructures and external surfaces in several cases. The intervention by the local community for the restoration and renovation in the manner of putting plasters or colors over the surfaces have had an impact on the integrity of the mosques. The boundary walls and auxiliary structures in several cases have been damaged. Nevertheless, these protected and state-owned buildings, as well as the temples under continuous use by the local Hindu communities, still have integrity in terms of their architectural traditions' distinctiveness and exceptional characteristics. They, besides, are testimony to a period of transformation and synthesis in the social and religious sphere of Bengal.

The front side of central temple of Eleven Shiva Temple (after restoration), Jashore District © DoA

Concluding remarks

Panel of terracotta figures on the exterior wall at Kantajee Temple, 1987 © DoA

As it was mentioned before, this publication is not an exhaustive detail and engagement with the brick temples of Bangladesh built during the Late Medieval and Colonial periods. From the perspective of architectural and artistic history, various notable works have been done. Scholarly works are also available on the formal and morphological classification and stylistic descriptions. Despite the available works, further research is required on these aspects of these temples. Simultaneously, it is also possible to think about these temples from other perspectives. Human actors and actions with these temples from the time of their foundation to date are emphasized in the narratives and histories of these sacred monuments. It is also possible to consider these temples as possessing agencies of their own, as 'things' from the past which are continuing to shape, create and refashion the imagination, memories, and experience of human actors to date. The heritage values of these temples can be perceived, augmented, and refashioned by taking into account the cultural biography of these monuments in contextual association with the landscape and other features, such as tanks and other monumental remains connected to them. Local communities and the tourists have equally engaged the processes of heritage making (heritagification) and their association with these temples can shed light on the complex interplay of monuments, sacred places, and popular domains. It is also possible to document all these aspects by archaeological as well as ethnographic fieldwork. Further works would be initiated to do the task of recording the temples, terracotta plaques and the contexts by the Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The department hopes to publish detailed and incisive publications in future including various aspects of historical meanings of these temples and thereby, attempt to look for their multiple meanings and values as heritage places.

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Appendix 1: Selected Photographs of Recent Conservation Work of Temples

Restoration work (2015-2017) of central temple at Eleven Shiva Temple, Jashore District © DoA

Monitoring during conservation work at Eleven Shiva Temple, Jashore District, 2016 © DoA

Reproduction of terracotta plaques at Eleven Shiva Temple, 2016 © DoA

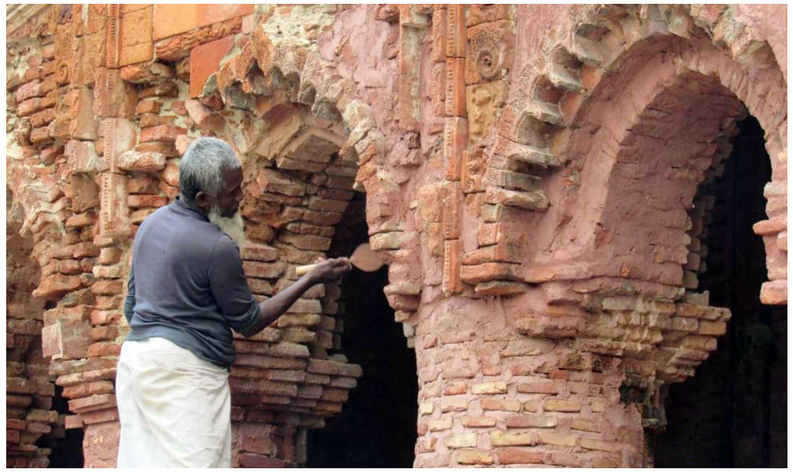
Stakeholder consultation during conservation work at Eleven Shiva Temple, 2016 © DoA

Conservation work (2015-2016) of Kantajee Temple, Dinajpur District © DoA

Preservation of terracotta plaques at Kantajee Temple, 2015 © DoA

Cleaning of terracotta art by expert at Kantajee Temple, 2014 © DoA

Reproduction process of terracotta plaques for Kantanagar Archaeological Museum, 2018 © DoA



Conservation work of Jor-Bangla Temple (2015), Pabna District © DoA

Conservation work of Puthia Bara Shiva Temple (2018), Rajshahi District © DoA

During Conservation at Archana Temple (2015), Dinajpur © DoA

After conservation, Archana Temple (2016), Dinajpur © DoA

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He obtained his M.Sc & B.Sc (honors) in Geography & Environment from Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. He started his career as an Assistant Custodian/Research Assistant in the Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh. After working in the department for more than 10 years he became quite efficient in GIS and Mapping, Archaeological Survey & Exploration, Archaeological Excavation & Exploration with using Harris Matrix method and Museum Management. He participated Training Course for Young Professionals on Cultural Heritage Protection jointly organized by UNESCO and ACCU, Nara, Japan, Workshop on preparation of Nomination file for UNESCO World Heritage List, Workshop for Protection of Cultural Heritage and International Conference on Development of Museums.

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He has practical knowledge in exploration, excavation and conservation through working in heritage management sector for more than 18 years. He had worked with Father of The Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Museum and Bangladesh National Museum. He has been working with DoA since 2011. He was the Conservation Archaeologist for Conservation, Restoration and Development of Ancestral House of Father of the Nation Bangabanddhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman, Tungipara, Gopalganj and Project Director of Conservation of Egaro Shiv Mandir, Jashore. Apart from Bangladesh he also participated as a trainee for Archaeological Excavation Abbey Cluny at France in 2016. He also got training from ACCU Nara at Japan on Research, Analysis and Preservation of Archaeological Remains. He is a member of ICOMOS, Bangladesh.

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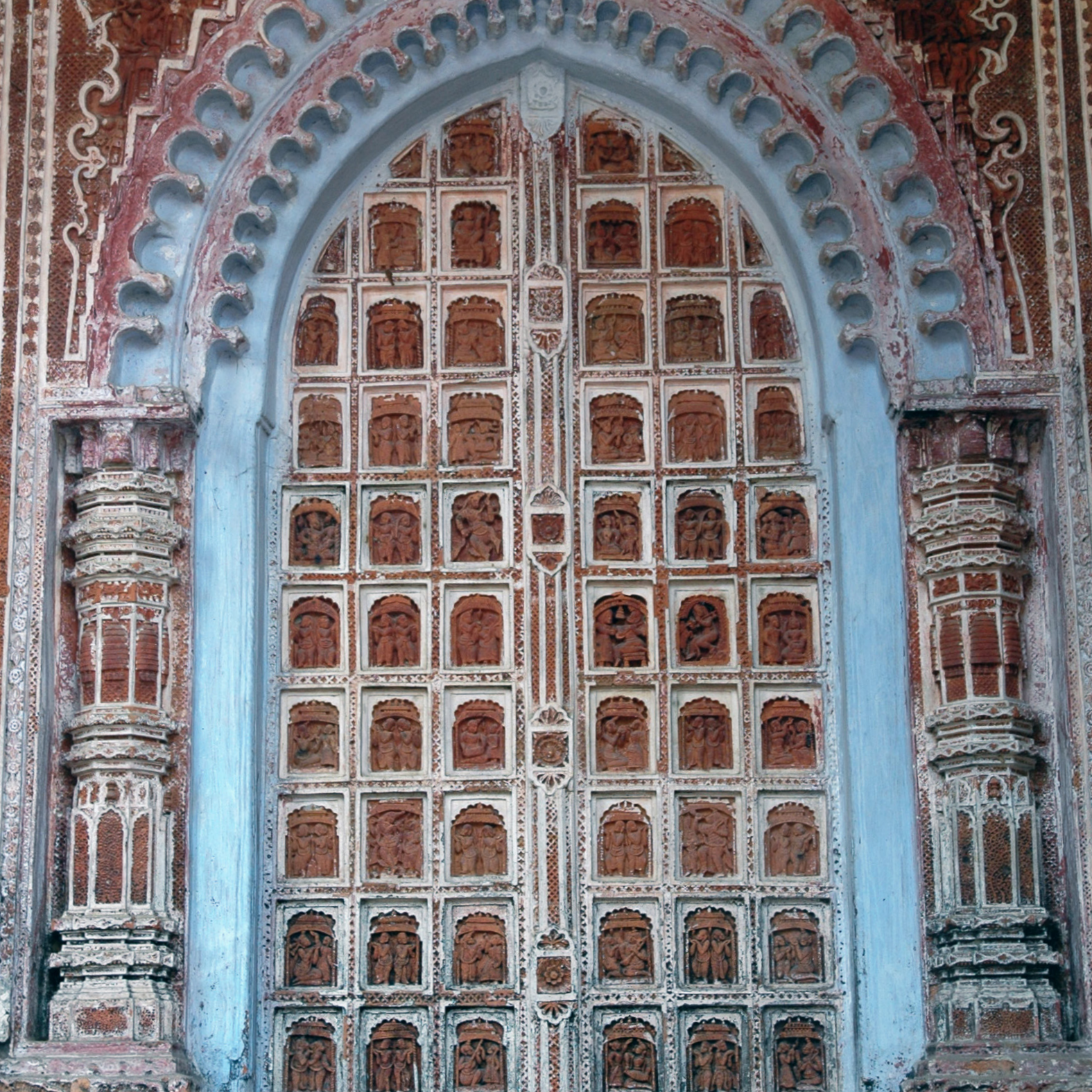
Swadhin Sen has been teaching in the Department of Archaeology of Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh, as a Professor. He has directed several excavations and undertaken full-coverage surveys in the northern part of Bangladesh. He has conducted ethnoarchaeological and ethnoecological studies in the north-western and south-western parts of Bangladesh. Currently he is directing research projects on the palaeoecology of Bengal and the archaeology of dynamic terrain of Bengal. His fields of interest also include politics of the pasts, critical studies of heritage, archaeologies of religions and rituals, archaeology of monuments and space, ethnography and netnography, popular culture of landscape and waterscapes, and cultural politics of ecology. He loves conversation with people and is passionately entangled with water and rivers. He also engages in blog writing, translation and other works on different platforms.